2022

SIGNET

LITERARY MAGAZINE

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LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Dear Readers,

I want to thank you so much for reading this year's copy of Signet! Every single one of our editors, readers, and graphic designers worked tirelessly to create the copy in your hands! At Signet, we pride ourselves on showcasing the creativity, diversity and brilliance of our campus community, and this year was no different. From art, to fiction, to critical writing, to music, this year's volume is a shining example of the excellence that is the community at Queens University of Charlotte. Our hope is that as you read these pages, you feel the same pride and joy that we do! Thank you to everyone who supports us, and we hope you enjoy!

Sincerely,

Emily DeAugustino

Dear Readers,

Thank you so much for picking up a copy of Signet 2022! Every member of this staff and our graphic design team has put in an incredible amount of work and care into making this year's edition and we all hope you enjoy it. The authors featured this year have brought a massive amount of talent and are a perfect example of the creative excellence you can find here at Queens and we're all so proud of each and every one of them. Our aim at Signet has always been to support the creative arts here on campus and within our student body and we work to expand every year into new and greater territories. I hope you feel we have done this university justice and are able to find a piece of this school, or even a piece of yourself, within these pages. Enjoy!

Thank you,

Jenna Plaisted

LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Hello, Queens Community!

The magazine you are holding is a celebration of creativity that is the culmination of months of hard work, dedication, and collaboration. This issue of Signet was made possible not just by a handful of people, but by many students, professors, creators, and everyone who reads our magazine (that includes you!). I wanted to take the time to thank everyone who was involved in this year's edition and those of you who continue to support our community of creators no matter what. Thank you all! This achievement wouldn't have been accomplished without the creative minds of our student contributors, so thank you to everyone who submitted their work to our magazine. We thoroughly enjoyed reading, watching, listening, and taking in each piece and I encourage you to continue submitting your work throughout your time at Queens. I hope you enjoy reading our magazine and that you feel welcomed into this creative community. We are so happy to have you! Lastly, I hope this magazine brings each of you joy, peace, hope, and light. Thank you again for your support and happy reading!

Sincerely,

Sophia Russano

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SPOTLIGHT Interview

A Conversation with Meg Rosenthal by Lara Boyle

Meg Rosenthal grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, and graduated from Queens University of Charlotte (Class of 2019) with a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. When she's not moonlighting as a novelist, Meg can be found working her day-job as a professional horseback rider and trainer. Meg also loves painting, all things pink, and preaching the importance of commas.

1. ***How are you feeling about your publishing journey and seeing your first book enter the world?***

Part of me doesn't believe it's real! It's been such a long process to get to this point—the first draft of this book was finished back in 2019. But even though it feels like a fantasy come true, it's incredibly nerve-wracking. I have been so grateful for all of the support that friends, family, and others have shown me but honestly, I'm way more anxious for the people I know to read the book.

2. ***You began writing The Right Words when you were a student at Queens under the guidance of Professor Sarah Creech for an independent study on novel writing. What was it like to work with a mentor to complete a full-length project alongside other courses?***

It was a lot of work between the readings and writing, but I couldn't have asked for a better experience. I remember reading multiple books, both nonfiction 'how-to' and books within my preferred niche genre, as well as meeting my own word count. The best thing I learned, though, was accountability. I got into the habit of writing at least 500 words a night and little by little I chipped away at a full novel.

3. ***Which chapter/scene of the book was your favorite to write and why?***

Chapter sixteen is by far my favorite of the book. I've never had a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants writing style – everything is usually painfully planned – however, the opening scene of this chapter was written fast without any real forethought. As a heavy flashback for the heroine of the book, it is also one of the only scenes that didn't undergo any major revision. It was originally written using a mild stream of consciousness technique and every time I reread it, I am thrilled with how it turned out.

4. Which part of the book was the hardest to write?

The first sentence. That thing was rewritten too many times to count and it finally came to me randomly when I was in the shower. To be honest though, I think the first sentence of this book is something that could continually change and evolve and I would still never be satisfied with it. The last sentence however simply dumped from my fingers onto my laptop with quite literally zero pre-planning and it still makes me mad how easy it was to write. It made the bucket list check box of "finishing my book" rather anticlimactic.

5. Who are your biggest inspirations?

As a writer, my biggest inspiration would have to be John Green. When I first discovered him as an author, I devoured his books. To me, they were the epitome of what I wanted to accomplish as a writer—they were witty, sharp, and real. Contemporary fiction has always been the genre I have been drawn to as a writer but reading his work with the added elements of intellect and humor, I quickly found inspiration in the type of book I wanted to work towards in my own writing career.

Aside from a writing muse, my daily inspiration is my mom. As a single mother with two daughters who loved the very expensive hobby of horseback riding, she taught me to never take "no, that can't happen," as an answer. In her vocabulary, impossible doesn't exist. Instead, she championed the "make it happen" ideology. Flash forward over a decade later, we have a booming family business riding, training, and selling horses and she instilled a work ethic and drive in me to find a way to succeed and never give up.

6. What books have sparked your interest lately? Any favorites you'd like to recommend?

The most recent book I completely lost myself in was Six of Crows by Leigh Bardugo. I actually read this book in an audiobook format while I drove back and forth from horse shows. Traditionally, I much prefer to be able to read the ink on real pages but there was something about the heist storyline being read on tape (where your eyes couldn't skip around the page) that made the mystery even more gripping. Every time a new plot point was introduced, I found myself saying surely they can't get out of this situation and every time, I was genuinely surprised and impressed with the characters' methodology and creativity. I was both figuratively, and literally, on the edge of my seat throughout the book.

7. Besides being an author, you're also a professional equestrian and horse trainer. Why did you first start horseback riding? I know that when I rode horses, the phrase "When you fall off a horse, get back up again" was a popular way to teach perseverance, which is also necessary for writing. Do these disciplines ever overlap?

So my mom grew up riding horses but abandoned the sport when she went to college. My younger sister actually started riding before I did. At the time I was doing dance and gymnastics and horses were smelly. Little did I know that in the future I would turn professional at 18 and be able to compete nationally across the country. All along though, I loved to write.

The perseverance aspect is definitely a part of both journeys. I've fallen off horses more times than I can count and the early drafts of The Right Words faced sufficient rejection. In both scenarios, I'm thankful I've gotten back up again. Also, an interesting way I've found these disciplines overlapping is in my teaching. After being in so many English and language classes at Queens, I found that my horseback riding lessons I taught improved as I found it easier to create different ways to communicate and explain techniques. Metaphors are quite handy.

8. During your undergraduate degree, you served as Senior Editor of Signet Literary Magazine and published an essay called "Writer's Journey" in the 2019 issue that was a wonderful, emotional exploration of your author origin story. If you could go back in time and give your past self a word of advice about writing or life, what would you say?

Too funny you found that – that piece in particular was a raw commentary on my relationship with storytelling for sure and it's interesting to go back and read it now while I'm able to hold my first book in my hands. I think the biggest advice I could give myself – albeit cliché – is to never give up. Manifesting dreams into reality was my way of convincing myself to keep trying. If you truly want something, you will find the resources to make it happen. The world is tough and can certainly test your determination but it's also vast enough to have multiple avenues to success if one path doesn't work out.

As of March 1st, The Right Words is out. Readers can order online through the Warren Publishing site or Amazon. It is also available through retailers like Barnes and Noble or smaller independent stores.

Poetry

I *See* You

Emily Anderson

I *See You*
I see it all, whether you
think anyone does or not. I see the
way you treat your "friend"
when you left her wondering
while you laughed at her, cheating
and snickering during a game of
Marco Polo. I see the way you
look for faults in others, just so
you have a reason to not like them.
I see the way you attack others who
have different viewpoints, because
You can't handle it, and when
you hold yourself on a higher podium
just to feel above everyone else.

But that doesn't matter right?
Everyone's done something like that. You
didn't mean any harm by it right? He just
talks funny, you know? She knows
we were just messing with her. You
were just joking around.

But until you
get snickered at behind your back
while playing a game with people who
you thought were your friends, until you
are on the receiving end of the attack, until all of
your flaws are picked and pointed at, you truly
don't know what it feels like. What you put them through. And for those
people, the watchers, and the people on the
receiving end, like me, I'm sorry. I know it hurts,
but it's not your fault. It never was.

Little Black Boy

Tyler Barnette

Look over there,
Little black boy.
Look to the stars and see
This world falling further into debauchery.

Look to the present,
Little black boy.
Look to the men being killed
in the streets.
The sounds of gunfire never missing a beat.
Always on repeat.

Look to you,
Little black boy.
A child of such virtue and naïveté,
You know not,
But those who torment you
Shall rue the day,
They stole your empathy.

Look to me,
Little black boy.
Your reflection. Your visage.
Because I am you,
And you are me.
We've seen it all, you and I.
Carnage and pain,
Spread across a multitude of graves,
Will it ever cease?
Or are we,
Supposed to

Look to the future,
Little black boy.
And gaze upon a world
Of apathy.

End of the Line

Megan Biesecker

I'm riding a train from somewhere to nowhere.
As I stare out the window,
the reflection of my soul mixes with the blurring countryside.
My eyes glaze, dusk edges the corners of my vision.

I'm riding a train from somewhere to nowhere.
The setting sun paints a masterpiece across the sky,
myriad colors dripping towards the horizon.
Twilight leaks through the clouds like black tea steeping,
darkness overtaking rolling hills and folding branches devoid of leaves.

I'm riding a train from somewhere to nowhere.
The land disappears beneath inky seas,
darkness all-encompassing.

I'm riding a train from somewhere to nowhere,
and I've finally reached my destination.

Anemoia

Megan Biesecker

n. Nostalgia for a time you never knew.

I see her face in my dreams, baby blue
eyes gazing down at me. It is a face
I have constructed from photographs and
old forgotten memories, from stories
and treasure boxes, put together piece
by piece until it became a face that
could love me and hold me, be proud of me
when I did the right thing, instead of one
that was demanding of me, that always
was disappointed in me, that didn't
deign to be what I was desperate for.
Her face I built, I begged for, and I broke,
because reality wasn't enough,
and she wasn't here as what I needed.
Instead, she was up there, down there, every
where but here with me, I cry. I am all

Alone.

Essential

An erasure poem from *The New Yorker*, March 15th, 2021

Lara Boyle

The doors will open
and it's like you never forgot
how to be a little sad
and a little
lonesome
without being sickly about it
there are things we love that we're going to lose
but in the creation of heartbreak
many are feeling "essential"
for the first time
with a multitude of new experiences
we always think can't happen here
the butter and the egg and
citrus scavengers
hang now like a war
transformed them
into luxuries.

Ankle-Deep

Astrid Bridgwood

After so long of not being a child,
I have the bitter urge to be held like one.

I'm alone again, or I'm in love again (something like it
something close). A feeling dark and wet, held
against my chest weeping through its cotton bag
staining the rug.

Mess on my shirt, bleeding out. *It's dark again*
In the space before slaughter. I wake
Sweating sun onto cold sheets. Postcard of this bed
Stamped *Wish You Were Here*: days ago, open arms
Offering to hold me.

I could live like this (in your embrace) in the space
Where air comes sweetly. Heart stowed under our mattress
Red-damp, seeping through. Warping wood: full to spilling
Staining the first-floor ceiling.

It was always supposed to be like this feel like this
And like every fool I call it fate (or something like it
something close). Us, string-tied, tugging under my nails
at pink-fresh skin picked on my knuckles.

That bright scar waits (a place in my chest
where hope settles). *I am honest*. Fear on my lips
Trembling in my mouth, thirsty. Oasis of stars
Nights beside you: something tastes like home.

After so long of loving (in my own pained, dark way)
I have the bright desire to dance.

Old Haunts

Astrid Bridgwood

& like always, I'm praying (in the dark) (between bed sheets)
hands clasped, crossing myself whispering words (or mouthing them)

into empty air. Eyes squeezed shut against it: the brutality (the love)
I cannot bear. My childhood in posters and bookshelves (outgrown)

I beg flat on my back, gaze held by pockmarked ceiling
plaster mimicking stars. Head between my knees, suffocating (relief)

& I ask you, again, for a sign (or directions). Future weighing heavy
No Magic 8-Ball clarity, a blue-black oracle's simple prophecy.

Life pushing down on my throat (full of breath) hands full
of desperate nights like these. A moving-water mirror (banks flood)

Fingers down my throat, *get it out there get it all out feel better*
when it's gone. Too much for the body to hold (too much)

For this hollow stomach, bloated with river.

& I'm back on the bathroom floor, circling the bowl with my arms
Waiting for that sign you promised me (that angel)

Facedown on porcelain, stuffed drain standing water
Bleeding out, blooming black mold between tiles (rotting grout)

Homesick and burdensome (heavy) (inexorable) (inescapable)
inconsolable. Another shower-death (another black-eyed girl).

& a priest asked me once what I came looking for (what I'd find)
crouched in the dark half-awake but not dreaming (tick-full and sick)

Into open-mouthed night. Am I praying for an answer (a breathless reply)
This firm press of flesh, palms meeting in silent night (holy night)
I want I want I want—

Luckless

Astrid Bridgwood

Filthy.
Walk alone on wet cement. Headlights crying
like children waiting for rescue. Come to underwater
Sitting in the bathtub dry-heaving, head burning
Heartbeat pulsing like a parasite
Waiting for Hell to open her mouth &

Swallow.
Gun is hot. Muzzle purring, empty-stomach growl
Steaming, sick & smoky. Voice in my ear:
I love you like agony. Smelling poison
tasting bile. Ask me *where's the wound?*
Seeping. Gunpowder, oil-black acrid &

Bloody.
Stub my cigarette out on a rock. Ash under my nails
Gun between my legs. *Where to now?*
Us: in this place between heaven & heartbreak.
We've almost made it her eyes dove-white
Pleading. Here are two women, holding Gun

Fingers on the trigger & the safety
Off.

¡Ándale Joven!

Elena B.

¡Ándale joven! Draw your gun.
He won't wait 'til noon is high
Be quick beneath the searing sun

You promised us it would be done
And we don't like it when you lie
¡Ándale joven! Draw your gun.

You best not turn your back and run
Fix that leak within your eye
Be quick beneath the searing sun

Deadly vows can't be undone
Your faith need be in strong supply
¡Ándale joven! Draw your gun.

Our holy savior, chosen one
Breathe a prayer to the sky
Be quick beneath the searing sun

Shoot him dead before he's spun
For against God he did defy
¡Ándale joven! Draw your gun.
Be quick beneath the searing sun.

An Incident After Dinner

Elena B.

After Agha Shahid Ali

My wrath is greater than that of God's.
It pricks me like the splinters from your vintage
table, the one you "saved" from damage and loneliness
when you took it from a stranger's yard. It, like me, has
scars from your "care." And now, the both of us have turned
on you. I hold one of its broken legs in hand so I can make you to-
othless. Blood is flowing from your mouth. You say it tastes like vinegar.

Moving

Mabry Busby

There is a place that I once thought was home.
Somewhere I haven't been in a long time.
It's dark, with rays of soft light shining through
the cracks of the dusty, boarded windows.
The floorboards creak with every cautious step
as sleeping, somber bats hang from above.

The door is closed, sealed tightly from the world,
padlocks and chains wrapped all around its frame.
You cannot force its old brass knob to turn
or beat your fists onto the splitting oak.
The few who tried to hold its coal-hot key
are burned and blistered from its scorching touch.

I cannot last remember when I went
back to that darkened place that I called home.

I moved away when I realized my worth.
Whenever I begin to reminisce,
I simply hold the key to my new home
and feel its cool touch on my blistered hand.

Magic Women

Emily DeAugustino

The women in my family possess magic, but they would never tell you that.
But I know that they do.

The women in my family brew spells in the kitchen.
The bubbling of the red sauce in the pot is not lost on me. The popping of the basil leaves tells *mai nona* the mood *di mia familia*.
The soft gurgle of the water whispering remedies into her ears:
Una testa de agolio e una balsico per lo stomico
Una canella per la sangue
Un rosmario per ricdori
Each recipe healing my mind and body
I ask her what the secret is, she just smiles.
"It's love!"
The magic isn't lost on me.

The women in my family whisper to things that aren't there.
The rosary above my bed is not lost on me.
My mother saying quick prayers, throwing salt over her shoulder when the house seems colder
She strings up chili peppers in the basement when the stairs creak too loudly
Whispering: *Sante Micheal, Sante Benedict, Santi Catherina*
Pregando Madonna
Saying blessings and prayers when the shadows move too quick
I ask her what the noise is, why are the shadows so sad?
She just smiles and lights a candle, Myrhh, and Frankincense

"You think I can't hear them too?"
I don't ask after that.

The women in my family see things before they happen
They say it's just lucky guesses, but it is not lost on me.

My *Zia* Cathy Marcy always guessing the gender of the next baby,
Knowing before my mother that she is pregnant
Zia Joan knowing the car will wreck before it ever hits the road
Cugina Rosie when illness will fall on the family
They whisper: *Maloccio! Maloccio!* And give me *pepersonco*
When I ask how they know these things, they just smile
"It's all a lucky guess!"
But I know better than that.
The women of my family bear *forza sorvmana*
They tell me my great grandmother would go the bars
Where my great-grandfather would be drunk and beaten
Fighting off men twice her size, with strength of the bull
And a cry of a lion
Eyes ablaze with hellish rage
She'd beat off men twice her age.
When I ask how she did it, *mia nonna* just smiles
"You look like her,"
I wonder if her eyes look like mine.

The women in my family possess magic in their bodies
Blessed by *La Madonna e Hekate*
With the waters of *Diana e Nyx* in their blood
Their smiles holding spells
Their hands holding blood
The women in my family possess the strength of *Jupiter e Samsun*
With the protection of *Michael e Mars*
Their hands flame and create and their hair curls and twists
Like the writhing sea or twisted vines

The women in my family possess magic, but we would never tell you that.
But I know that we do.

Love, Ryan

Maggie Dineen

happiest time of my life
when I felt closest to You,
now filled with strife
left only with a tattoo.

Redial

Maggie Dineen

I'm reaching out to you,
48 missed calls.
Met with a blank screen,
I wonder if you're alive.
Panic, stress, love
All consume my mind
As I hit redial
49 missed calls.
Met with a blank screen,
I wonder why you've cut me,
off too
Your own sister?
I wonder if he's alive.
Anger, confusion, love
Race through my mind
As I hit redial 50 missed calls.
Please, don't leave me with a blank screen.

After

(After Ada Limón's "Before")

Ellie Fritsch

I sit once more on
the worn carpet of
my childhood home.
After the affair.
After the broken boy,
with the broken smile.
After he broke me as well.
After the screaming matches
and the forgiveness that followed.
Every time.
After the chair.
After the clasp broke.

And the flesh broke too.
After my thoughts like lovers' fingers
were too interwoven to see straight.
After blessed mercy
and after mercy was not bestowed.
After on Interstate 85
I realized it was do or die,
that this, here and now,
was the only second chance
I would ever be given.
After the feeling of slowly waking up
turned into realization that I
kept forgiving, and loving a monster.
After I jumped from the moving car,
like a falling star, like a leap of faith.
I never knew leaping would feel
for a moment like flying,
a moment's weightlessness
before planting into cold concrete.
The wind, and the love,
knocked out of me.

I was too young and too foolish
then to know that the pain—
that terrible, glorious pain—
was proof that I was still alive.

Ribs

Ellie Fritsch

My mother read me a chapter from Genesis—
the creation of man—
how God sculpted Adam, dust to dust,
and ashes to ashes.
She read how Adam's marrow made a wife of Eve,
and I asked who gave up a rib for me and mine?
"Oh my lovely child," she told me,
"How lucky you are? For you are pure
and clean and untouched by a man's design.
Dust is not the origin of your bones,
so my little daughter,
do not let this world sell you any armor,
for all your ribs are yours
and yours alone."

I entered the world with all
of my pieces and parts still intact.
But I left my heart exposed to the elements,
where fiends and crows could pick
and peck between my ribs' cracks
at the beating life I had laid bare.
And the monsters, whose faces were human,
crowded in and tore through my stomach,
my ribs, my back,
eating away at the most
tender pieces of me.

The world offered me armor,
and at first I refused.
Then they consumed my sweet resistance
and tore apart my flesh between their teeth.

They skinned my ribs dry and feasted
on all the loveliest parts of me.
So I tried to shield my heart with my hands,
but was too weak,
too afraid to run,
barely steady on my knees, on my own feet
I could not even stand.

The world offered me armor again,
and I took it, with shaking, greedy,
calloused fists.
I smeared their brick and mortar between my bones,
rising fierce and fortified.
And oh, my ugly organs, how lucky we are?
Finally handed down a shield for our fragile parts.
I let them lay stones in place of ribs,
became the unbreakable mountainside.
A red smile painted on my lips
with my own flowing blood,
savage obedience etched into every line,
every crack,
every feature,

my body's empire dressed in
fierce falsehoods of confidence,
taught to utter again and again
that I am fine,
and my skin is re-sewn to be unmarred
in the rising dawn's light.

The world bared its pointed teeth in a feral grin,
insisted I was now unbroken,
chanted and beckoned me,
with nothing but a stolen shield of pretense
and my ugliest parts left,
to come forward, come feast,
come sink my teeth into the soft flesh
of others foolish enough
to leave their hearts exposed between fragile ribs.

Fearing they would strip me
of my protection, return me to be attacked,
expose the half torn apart heart—

still beating, still my own— as easy prey,
I opened my jaws and bit back.
I tore apart with teeth and words.
It's a graceless dance of epithets, and
I learn to make someone hurt.

But when the hurting is over,
and we return to quiet houses and
have to face our quieted minds,
we are appalled at the mirage of flesh
pulled over ribs that are not our own,
we no longer recognize our own dull reflections,
nor the words cried out loud
with our own mouths,
words to tear down others.
And how,
after all that we've let happen to us,
can we ever return home
to face our mothers?

I'm sorry, mother,
for the ribs that are no longer my own,
and the words that keep
spilling from my lips
that I did not utter.
My smile is fake, my hands are bloody,
but my heart is still mine.
It still beats for me
and me alone, though
I am unclean, flawed by another's design.
And oh, my half a heart, how lucky we are?
So fragile, calloused, and bruised,
but still my own part.

My heart is still my own.
My heart is still my own.

Necklaces in Storefronts

Abigail Gregg

I was told not to care about what other people thought of me

So I went out and bought books filled with beautifully crafted poems and necklaces that I might never wear
Walking out of those store fronts and towards happiness

The store fronts turned into bedroom doors and happiness turned to faraway thoughts
The necklaces have dust on them now

Was I stupid to get them? I was never going to be able to wear all of them

I'm not really here
I was never actually here

People's thoughts and perceptions of me flow through me like cold liquid that flows from an IV
Everything I am is shaped and molded like a sad piece of clay

Who am I to think a necklace can lead to newfound individuality?

Your hands sit around my neck
You are choking me- I can't find the air to tell you to stop

"What a beautiful necklace," the world seems to say

Your nails dig into the skin of my neck
Withering in pain- stepping back and bowing down to your authority over my life

But I never tried to unclasp your hands.

A Message to My Muse

(After Morris R. O'Rear)

Abigail Gregg

The memory of you and
I has decayed. My grief is so
Poignant. It consumes me, just as
You once did. You never understood why those poets
Unleashed their undying burdens. I wrote to you often.
My words spilled onto pages, pleading you to do
Something. Anything. One day, I'll
Cease to remember the one I called my muse.
Time will go on,
But I will not look for you.
Because I will feel, once again.

As it Burns and Breathes

Luke Haefner

Autumn settles on Virginia
As the trees gift a blanket down,
And I spot people peering crossly round
Their doors dismayed as their lawns
Are gently overlayed with a crisp and leafy brown;
And these people, irked by Autumn,
Bundle in lean pants and coat,
And hoist their rakes and other tools,
Abiding, without question, mindless rules
To gut the tales which Autumn sweetly wrote.
Of all the authors through these hills,
It's not the falling leaves which twist
Logic end and end like storm-ailed trees,
But whichever god bestowed their will,
As vague and touchless as the setting mist,
That their people should judge Autumn, as it burns and breathes,
As only that yearly time when they should rake the leaves.

But For a Rosy Battlefield

Luke Haefner

A word of love is healing's seed
Planted in a soul in need
Which sprouts a limb, a limb, a limb,
Until it soothes the hate within,
The seething hate within.

It wraps round every beat and breath
Until the blossom's life or death,
The blossom's bloom inside yourself

Is an emblem of your health,
The emblem of your health.

A word's the seed, a word's the air,
The light, the soil, and tender care—
Your heart's the barren battleground
Where a single rose is found,
The first red rose is found.

Take good care and it shall grow
And soon a hundred blossoms show;
What once was the home of dead
Is now a lovely flower bed,
The brightest flower bed.

Pilots, gods, and souls at stake,
Will wonder at the rosy lake,
Naming new the arid land,
Now from sea and shining sand
To every shining sand.
Thick between the bloody fray
Are roses high to block their way,
And they betray their fatal hand
To view the emblems of the land,
Emblems of a better land.

And you, yourself, you paint the dawn
Where the canvas is the lawn;
Each day you wonder by what chance
A word could stifle war's advance,
Where hate was sheer and would not yield
But for a rosy battlefield.
And you, yourself, you paint the dawn
Where the canvas is the lawn;
Each day you wonder by what chance
A word could stifle war's advance,
Where hate was sheer and would not yield
But for a rosy battlefield.

So Too Will I

Luke Haefner

As long as music never dies;
As long as a croon never turns a cry;
As long as song is bright and bold,
So too will I turn young from old,
So too will my cheeks keep always dry,
So too will its close be my final sigh—
While life can't be when music dies,
As music lives,
So too will I.

Communion

Emily Iknayan

Perhaps I should season the cast iron
of my cherry Le Creuset tomorrow.
An improper seasoning precedent,
or willful neglect, according to some.
All it takes is some soap and water and
time to dry and oil and an oven,
but shouldn't the oft wedding of hissing
olive oil and onions be enough?

The volatility of an onion
might push the faint of heart out of the kitchen,
but I would cut a French Onion Soup amount
of onions if it meant I was able
to break bread with kin (or those close to it)
at a table we wish were round.

Wet Boots

(After William Carlos Williams)

Emily Iknayan

Toes numbed so,
preventing much
tending to the stock that depends
on you. Powder lands upon
eyelashes, and a
nose becomes red.
Not daring to get behind any wheel,
eyeing the frostbitten barrow
as glasses are glazed
with
dots of rain.
The pipes near bursting from frozen water,
only a Collie stands beside
you in the
winter. A barren and white
homestead keeps on without chickens.

Frankenstein

Cooper Knight

From beneath the abyss
I hear walls tremble
With the hiss of malice –
The blame burns through my skin

Light diverted from
The entrance,
It keeps the hell inside
While this host decays

And when
Nature plays its games
I reject all warmth
Of this forsaken embrace

Black eyes beckoning
Sunset alight with death
Cruel gaze, looming over me
Pursuing a hatred, hell's torrid breath

Good morning, demise
Welcome destruction
There's blood on my hands
But you own my corruption

Depleted landscapes
Home to the misery you harbor
Voids built to confine
My abhorred Frankenstein

Murmurations

Connor Lindsay

A murmuration is a liberated brain.
Feathery neurons that fire and flash,
dart back and forth, so close but never crash,
mix chaos and law, unified yet unconstrained.

Silver wings that reflect the dawn of the morning
capture the wind in their disordered dance
as they flurry through a cloudless expanse.
Signals in flight patterns send avian warnings.

Hundreds of disparate particles that each flow
independently and dependently;
a living snowstorm, amorphous and free,
while we, grounded, can only watch from down below.
They must pity our disconnected fate,
our inability to murmurate.

Cape Hatteras

Connor Lindsay

The lighthouse caught a glimpse of me
as I stood on the balcony
and looked out at the evening sea
alone, it must have thought, and we
stood together for a while,
stone legs leaving us immobile,
until, with a sad but tired smile
I turned and walked away.

This tower, this spiraling star
looms over the coast, looking far.
A watchful eye on the sandbar
that sees how lonely we all are.
It provides comfort with its blinks,
and in the night, alone, it thinks
that through its light it creates links
that bind us, in the day.

VILLAIN(ELLE)

Chase Mauerhan

It's a game, it's all a game
Laying naked in his bed
while my neck is covered in flames

It's constant— the feeling of shame
the rancid images playing in my head
It's a game, it's all a game

Always faking it— telling him I came
Making my heart turn to lead
while my neck is covered in flames

I hate the thoughts that I can't tame
like drifting to her image instead
It's a game, it's all a game

Picture perfect in my ornate frame—
painted as if I were dead
while my neck is covered in flames

I hate this bed, my tears feel lame
Made up feelings that keep hearts fed
He's a game, it's all a game
While my neck is covered in flames

I'm Not Sorry

Mayah McNelly

I'm sorry. I can't do it. I don't care about
Stained glass or Holy whereabouts.

No, Momma,
I can't keep living—
As if I believe

The words are spoken, only to deceive.

I bear no tie to wafers and wine.
No joy is had from the Label of "Bad."

And emerald green tapestries are beautiful,
Of course,
But they cannot amend my remorse.

The sanctuary where I once rested
Now feels to be painfully infested
With slithering lies for who I am.

I'm sorry Momma,

I truly am.

The Night's Stars

Mayah McNelly

Indoctrination is never something
The indoctrinated are aware of.
Grown up to believe their superiority
Is inarguably real.
But how could there be so many
Contradicting truths?

I suppose if both Night
And Day can coexist, so can we.
For though the Day hides
The Night's stars,
They continue to shine,
Awaiting their Nightly spotlight.

The Wood

Allison Morton

Simple sanctuaries
of swaying oak and pine
bare over shrouded
paths of unknown.
Blue birds flit and fly
from twig to vine.
A hasty gale beckons me
over a wall of stone,
pulling me by the hair
and pushing at my spine.
I find the road
hidden
under flowers overgrown.

Woodman hums an icy tune
in the hallowed forest, all alone.
Dusk follows his melody,
bringing the ink of nighttime.
Faithful friends, sociable strangers,
urge me to confide,
why I am here walking
through this forest of bygone
with unkind berries and bitter sap.
Uncertainty grows inside.
In days past I often thought
of this wood as home.

Push Play To Start

Fatimah Ndiaye

Trust me, I want you... But I don't need you
I've got you tattooed on my mind
I'm swimming

You're mine
My vision is clouded
I told you I loved you
I lie. I run. I'm running
I ruined you dear
Yet, it's hard for you to let me. Go... isn't it?

Well dear, two halves will never make a whole
My problems catch me every... Time
Time. I attach myself to you
I'm a leech. Don't trust me dear

Hold tight, let me go
I broke you... now we are equal
My demons are catching up
You know me... know me now
You loved me. I haunted you
I'm not sorry...

My mom ran
My dad sprinted
...and so I ... Well, I drowned
It's all a game, love
I enjoy the thrill of it all

Play again...

"It's nice to meet you! Come over later?"

Blink

Owen Panos

It was always just us, my sibling and
I, with such young parents. We learned, played, fought
like children. Screaming fits, where words were thrown.
Days filled with exploring the lush expanse
of woods, learning not to touch certain leaves
and which rocks had frogs hidden under them.
Bike tires crunched over the dirt driveway,
as we chased robbers, dragons, and monsters
alike. We had each other, like always.
Blink.
A thin layer of rust covers the once
sage green bike I used to ride. Gone are the
opalescent scales of fictional things.
We were quiet, withdrawn. Certain nights, when
the song of crickets was echoing in
my head, I'd text them. When I got a small
response, I would avoid the one creaky
floorboard outside her door and knock. Once, twice,
three times. I'd open the door, the hinges
that cried no matter how much love it got.
Our giggles and snorts and ugly belly
laughs would deafen even the loudest bugs.
Blink.
Shrill cries filled our house. He was so tiny
yet still so loud. My hesitant footsteps

would pad across the wood, eyes trailing the
familiar walls. Tilting my head up, like
it would make me just tall enough to see
over the bookshelf in the living room.
I would sneak glances at my new brother.
Small wrinkly hands, weird pink skin, tearful
doe eyes. I wasn't sure how to be a
big brother all over again, but I'd
try for him. I wanted to. So, I did.
Blink.
The crash of plastic smashing together,
thunderous feet running up and down the
stairs. High, bubbly laughter and mournful
cries, fat tears on bright red cheeks. Stars picked from
the sky to be put in his eyes when he
wanted something. Nonsensical stories
about dinosaurs, fairies, and Minecraft
filled my mornings, afternoons and nights. There
in my room, with the same bed frame from when
I was five, I laid with him tucked to my
side. Reflecting in his glossy, brown eyes,
I saw myself as I was but also
the child I used to be. I promise
I'll be ready for the next blink. I swear.

After

(After Ada Limón's "Before")

Sophia Russano

Barefoot and nervous,
I pace the cold hardwood
floor, back and forth,
back
and
forth,
my mind is a spiral
of darkness.
After the scabs and scars.
After the acne-ravaged skin.
After the piles of pulled-out hair
on my desk and floor.
After countless nights of lost sleep
and oceans of tears.
After the night on the adirondack chair.
After hours on therapist's couches
and empty boxes of tissues.
After the diagnoses,
at the end of the appointment,
I never knew that regular people
don't have to repeat their thoughts four times
or stay up until 1 AM working on a simple sixth grade
social studies assignment.
And as I round my room for the 16th time
(four times four)
I remind myself
that I'm suffering
and here I was thinking
all of this
was normal.

Disappearing

Sophia Russano

Do you remember when Alice fell down the rabbit hole?
I wish I could disappear like that.
Oh, how wonderful adventures can be.
It's a lovely thing, you know, to lose yourself and find yourself all at once.

I wish I could disappear like that.
To find an enchanted world within this one would be a gift.
It's a lovely thing, you know, to lose yourself and find yourself all at once,
because sometimes it takes a nightmare to show you you had the strength to wake up all along.

To find an enchanted world within this one would be a gift.
As much as I wish to escape from my problems, I know I will find more here,
because sometimes it takes a nightmare to show you you had the strength to wake up all along.
What will my world be like, I wonder? Will I dance among the stars and talk to flowers?

As much as I wish to escape from my problems, I know I will find more here,
but that's okay; sometimes you need to disappear to see yourself clearly.
What will my world be like, I wonder? Will I dance among flowers and talk to the stars?
When will it be my turn to choose the path I take, to befriend the chaos?

But that's okay; sometimes you need to disappear to see yourself clearly.
You're never alone in Wonderland, that kingdom of colorful madness.
When will it be my turn to choose the path I take, to befriend the chaos?
Oh, Alice! Can't you take me with you?

You're never alone in Wonderland, that kingdom of colorful madness.
When you disappear, you can meet your mind's monsters and learn they are your closest friends.
Oh, Alice! Can't you take me with you?
For there is freedom in falling, that gravity-powered flight.

When you disappear, you can meet your mind's monsters and learn they are
your closest friends.
And with their help, we find a way to thrive, even when we don't know fact from
fiction,
for there is freedom in falling, that gravity-powered flight.
I wish to travel to that in-between place while awake, but I suppose that's why
they call it
daydreaming.

And with the help of our monsters, we find a way to thrive, even when we don't
know fact from fiction.
Do you remember when Alice fell down the rabbit hole?
I wish to travel to that in-between place while awake, but I suppose that's why
they call it
daydreaming.
Oh, how wonderful disappearing can be, losing and finding yourself all at once.

An Old Friend

Emily Walter

An old friend greeted me this morning.
Time had stretched and it was unfamiliar,
Yet I greeted him with a hello and continued on.
Like delicate seams, we'd come undone.

Time had stretched into the unfamiliar.
Faces that used to laugh and smile
Like delicate seams, came undone.
The unraveling ribbons of my sanity trailing behind me.

Faces that laugh and smile
Faded into the ebony locks of my memory,
Trailing behind the loose ribbons of sanity behind me
Before finally slipping under the cracks of my door.

As he faded into the ebony locks of my memory,
I had no idea how terrifying death seemed
Before he slipped under the cracks of my door,
His bony hand waving hello to me from beyond.

It occurred to me how terrifying death seemed,
When an old friend greeted me this morning.
His bony hand waving hello to me as
I greeted him with a hello and continued on.

ANYMORE

Reign Watkins

My best friend used to hold me,
Arms cradling my kidneys
And legs wrapped tight round my intestines
Eggshell white fingernails scratching my lungs
We don't do that anymore
My best friend used to cry to me,
But the cry sounded more like a joke
It made me laugh into the telephone
We don't cry like that anymore
My best friend used to love me
But we never loved like that
We didn't need love like that
We only needed each other
Each other
I saw you in a timeline of each and every other
A second from the future and an eternity from what we used to do
You spat my name like it burnt your tongue and I hoped it had
I screamed through the telephone
While the buzz of static caused only by neglect screamed right back at me
from the other side
I apologized three years later
I still don't think I was the only one at fault
You don't agree
But you used to hold me, didn't you?
You sank your stake into my stomach
And called it best friends forever
I have the necklace to prove it
You used to cry to me
I wish at least one of us knew why
At least I can say you still love me
But I know
We don't do that anymore

FICTION

Beautiful

Reign Watkins

I lost the Beauty of the world.

I'm not sure when exactly it all faded away, but I know that it's happened.

I find myself thinking, "Well, what was Beautiful anyway?" I can't answer that question concretely. But perhaps I can attempt to describe it in moments. Moments floating like bubbles, contained in an iridescent capsule, ready to burst any second now and leave my memory forever.

Beautiful was my first concert. The chill of the November air, and the flashing of lights, with music so loud I could feel it shaking my body. The sounds swept me up into them. At that moment I wasn't just someone in the audience, I was the music.

Beautiful was the only light source in the room being the television, playing our favorite movie. It cast buzzing static shadows on her face. All sharp angles juxtaposed with soft curves. She said to me, just as the characters in the movie did, "Breathe through my mouth."

So, I did. I think that was the only time I ever truly loved her.

Maybe that was just some twisted foreshadowing.

Beautiful was sugar highs and sleepovers that lasted a week. Glow sticks thrown into the pool, and the weird feeling in my back from sleeping on the couch with two other people at once. I didn't want to admit to myself that the hot summer days and bunk beds were only temporary.

Beautiful was the city. Towering buildings, higher than I knew could exist. Being small. Digital billboards and busy crosswalks. Walking the streets until there was nearly a hole in both my shoes. I would stay there forever if I could.

Beautiful was the moment that I was told "Don't dream it." The stone stairs I was sitting on were cold, but I couldn't feel it. It felt like I was reaching out, and in turn being reached out to. I was being embraced by blue and purple lights, my soul felt fuzzy. With every crescendo I drifted higher, the world narrowed to glitter and a crooning guitar. My very life was being cradled in the arms of a force beyond myself. At that moment I was seen, and I was heard, but I wasn't alone. I was there, with two dozen other people, singing the same songs, dancing along because we all knew every move.

Maybe, for at least a moment, I was Beautiful too.

How to Fail at Mourning

(After Lorrie Moore)

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

First, you didn't cry when your parents told you the unfortunate news. They dragged you out of your room and both of your parent's brown eyes wouldn't or, rather, couldn't meet yours and were on the edge of exploding. They sat you down somewhere comfortable with pillows and fluffy blankets that you hugged against your chest as if they were the teddy bear that got left behind on the move to the new house. This teddy bear was appropriately named Teddy by your five-year-old self that your seventeen-year-old self barely recognized after your Tio Gabriel won it for you at the yearly fair. The same fair that the two of you attended nearly annually although, he always complained about it as the two of you devoured a cheesy pastel. You cried for five weeks straight afterward for Teddy until you were gifted a puppy, sua Brutus, by that same Tio as he told me that it was the only way to end your endless choro.

Your mother began to speak with trembling hands, hiccupping the entire way, "Sweetie...your father and I have something to tell...it will be hard to hear.... I need you to be strong.... your.... your.... I can't do this. You tell her."

He looked at her for a second with a stare that resembled pity before nodding and taking a deep breath. "Meu amor," he said before wiping his sweaty palms on the dark denim of his pants. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but your Tio Gabriel.... he.... he passed away today."

Your stomach began to twist around itself like two snakes fighting over a mouse, but all you mumbled out was a single okay. Then you returned to your room full of half-assed, half-finished, and half-understood assignments, where Brutus waited for you with a wagging tail, but you just threw him out of your room by his red collar. You left behind bewildered parents shaking their heads and staring at the imprint of where you once sat.

You spent all your days afterward, clicking away on a computer and solving number and letters equations with dull and chewed-on pencils weeks before the due date. You always woke up early, 5:00 in the morning early, and decided to deep clean the entire house. You began with your room, cleaning up all the food wrappers and lined papers off the floor. Then you escalated to the rest of the house; your parents' room, sister's room, bathrooms, kitchen, and everything else that remained. You even cleaned the hidden corners of the basement with spiderwebs that lingered on your clothes weeks afterward. As a child, you were terrified of that basement, used to swear up and down to your family that it was haunted by the alligator- woman, Cuca, who gobbled up naughty

children that stayed up past their bedtime. You cleaned it all to the sound of festive Latin and Brazilian music. Your favorite was Legião Urbana, constantly screaming out the Pais E Filhos lyric, "Você me diz que seus pais não lhe entendem/Mas você não entende seus pais" as you mopped the white bathroom tiles with bubbling Lysol foam.

Over a week, you watched as your family transformed into emotional zombies. Their backs were constantly curved downwards with their brown eyes glued to the cracked wood behind their feet. They were noiseless during those days, only replying with a subtle nod or thumb up at your questions. They groaned and moaned at everything else; the sound of red cardinal birds singing at the window, the clicking from the turner panels of the white stove, the voices of the reporters from the daily news. If they had to speak actual words or, God forbid, a sentence, then they would take a big sigh and wipe their already leaking bloodshot eyes before mumbling something out.

Your younger fifteen-year-old sister started living with mascara smudges beneath her brigadeiro eyes that reached down to her pale and freckled cheeks. She hibernated in her room, within her sky-blue painted walls with rock band posters, blasting depressing music to the absolute max volume. The mascara stained her white silk pillows in her room that was cluttered with the clothes that she threw across the wooden floor. There were always picture frames scattered throughout her mattress, with her nearly always lying down in the middle of them.

Your mother couldn't stand to stay inside her room, much less her casa azul for a long time. She slept at her sister's, Tia Maria, for a day; her mother, avó Clara, for two days; her friends, Isabella, and Julia, for one day in each house; the neighbors' house for two days. She would sleep anywhere else rather than the house she spent weeks searching for alongside your father and painting the peeling paint with a long paintbrush and white overalls. She wouldn't sleep, however, while inside the house. She just kept walking back and forth through the hallway from your room to hers while mumbling to herself or anyone else still awake at three in the morning.

Your father, however, could always be found with his and Tio Gabriel's childhood photo album in his hands. The album was held together by a couple of strings of red yarn at the course of its spine. His mother, your avó, had sewed it together with twitching hands over the dinner table months before she passed away, weeks before your birth. His boney fingers flipped through all the plastic pages of the album over hours before returning to page one all while sitting on his favorite grey recliner chair. Then he would turn to anyone close by, even to empty airs at times, and tell the story behind the photo, such as how Tio Gabriel managed to get that bruise over his eyebrow or how he stole a baby tiger from a traveling carnival. He smiled for a second, a mere second, afterward then he would transform back and return to his photos.

When the day of his funeral, September 2, finally arrived, you were the worst one there, even worse than Tia Valentina and Tio Miguel. This achievement should have been impossible. For Tia Valentina was the Tia who puked on Tio Gabriel's widow, who had the ovaries to holler like Tarzan, "Why God! Why not me! Take me instead!" to his children and had to be carried to her car by four adult men, one of them was your father and the priest. Tio Miguel was the Tio who arrived drunk with a six-pack of Bud Light handing from his left hand and Jack Daniels dangling from the right, whose snores drowned out the words of the priest and badly danced by himself during the service. However, somehow you found a way. There was judgment circling around about your peculiar behavior during the service, being passed around like bubbling champagne and finger-size hors d' oeuvres.

"Why did you tell the priest that story?" "Why were you telling funny stories about the deceased?" "Why are you telling everyone that story, you know the one where Tio Gabriel broke his nose, got permanently banned from a grocery store in Campinas, and somehow left with a llama?"

You just responded with a laugh, not the bleak and emotionless chuckle of everyone else when his widow, Tia Camilla, told the story of their last trip together, but instead a real laugh, ones that come from the bottom of your gut. Your laughter caused you to have a hunchback of a witch and snore like a farm pig until the funeral music in the background was barely a squeak of a mouse.

Since his death and even more frequently since the funeral, your days, weeks, and months were surrounded by: "You are so strong, sweetie, but it's okay to cry." "Such a strong girl, but you should cry." "You can cry if you want to." "You don't have to keep up a front; cry if you want." "Go ahead and cry. No one will judge." "Let it all out, honey, and cry." "Cry as much as you need." "Meu Amor, cry." "You know that you want to cry." "Go ahead, cry for Tio Gabriel." "Cry for Tia Camilla and her children who lost their husband and father." "You need to cry;" "Let it all out, sweetie, and cry." "You have to let it all out, cry." "Cry." "Cry." "Cry." "Cry." "Cry." "Why won't you cry?" "Didn't you love your Tio?" "Then why won't you just cry?" "Do you not love your family?" "Do you not feel for your Tia and Primos?" "Aren't you sad?" "Do you not feel sadness?" "Do you not have any emotions like some damn sóciopata?" "What is wrong with this girl; why won't she cry?" "Cry, dammit!" "Chorar," "Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Chorar!" Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Chorar!" "Is she a psychopath; she won't cry!" "Chore, droga!" "Something is wrong with that girl!" "There is something wrong with your cousin; with your niece; with your granddaughter; with your daughter!" "She needs help!" "Ela não vai chorar!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Cry!" "Why can't you just cry already!"

Two months passed since the funeral, a week and two months since Tio Gabriel's death when your mother decided to pay you a visit in your room. At first, you didn't hear the quick tap, tap, tap against the pine door for your focus was on the equation

written out, then crossed out, then crossed out for a second time around on a lined sheet of notebook paper. Then the tapping against the pinewood became a hard and firm smack against the door. You jumped from the office chair that your father bought for dez 'reais' at a garage sale two years beforehand. It was only then that you turned your head over your shoulder as the short hairs alongside your neck stood up like soldiers called to order, and you mumbled out what.

"Filha, I need to talk to you. Turn the computer off and come sit down on your bed," your mother said with eyes of silver stones.

You shook your head, "But, Mãe, I have to do...."

"Now," she said before sitting down on your messy bed and patting the spot next to her close to where Brutus was sitting on the ground.

You nodded your head before following her with eyes glued to your white carpeted floor littered with a couple of dark pink wrappers with a couple of blue and yellow dots of your favorite candy, Sonho de Valsa.

You desperately needed to clean up again; your room was a pigsty. You thought to yourself as you pulled your feet away from Brutus's slimy pink tongue.

She played with her golden wedding ring before staring deep into your eyes and saying, "Don't you sente falta, minha filha? Do you not sente falta at all?"

"Sente falta?"

"You know. Sente falta," she kept staring at you until it began to burn against the side of your forehead, "What you feel when you....? Or what you feel when someone.....?" She huffed in annoyance. "You do know what sente falta is, right? Right?"

There was a Turma da Mônica band-aid with Magali trying to devour her favorite treat, a juicy watermelon, wrapped around your ring finger. It was hiding a nick that you made the day before when you were cutting up onions for the rice. You cut yourself with the sharpest knife of the kitchen after your father wept out, so loud that it scared the Betta fish swimming in its tank on top of the kitchen table after getting the Facebook notification of Tio Gabriel's birthday. You just kept staring at it, pulling at the end that was no longer clinging to your flesh as your mother began to speak.

"Sente falta means that you constantly miss someone or something. You feel it when someone dies. It almost feels like a wound that forms near your heart. It's lives there beside the other wounds of your previous loved ones when they went to somewhere else, somewhere hopefully better. You experience it continuously, just festering there in your chest until it's all that you can feel; when you are in the grocery store, cooking, making up your bed, reading, or even while sleeping. Your entire existence as a human revolves around missing them, constantly, until it's the only thing that you can do."

She took a deep breath and wiped the tears spewing out. "I feel it all the time since Tio Gabriel passed away. I felt it since my mom, minha mãe linda, left this earth. Even when meu Zeca, my childhood Golden Retriever, passed away. Do you understand? Do you sente falta? Do you at all? Just a little bit?"

You just stood up, sat at your chair that groaned at your weight, and stared at the equation before you. A sigh of relief escaped your lips when you finally heard the creak from the lock on the door and Brutus' claws tapping against the hard floor.

Afterward, three months after Tio Gabriel's death, the family album was locked inside the nightstand beside your father's side of the bed. It remained there next to a couple of novels that he swore he would finish by the end of the year for the last two years. Nightly soccer games occupied your home again, the invisible fourth resident of your two-story home returned from its months ago trip. Father's occasional foul language that your mother told never to reply unless you wanted a mouth of soap came back as well, making your feet vibrate through the white carpet. You, however, found yourself pressing replay over, over, over, and over at the last voice message that Tio Gabriel sent to you through WhatsApp. The voice messages where he complained about one of his employers and the situation with the monkey. Later, you just shook your head and found yourself smiling again.

Three months and ten days since Tio Gabriel's death, your mother started to have friends over again for one cafezinho that ended up being at least three. They would spend more than three hours together in the kitchen, squeezed tightly together like a pack of ants, talking about everything from politics to plain old gossip. Then they walked to your front yard, diga tchau e até amanhã, and ended up spending more than two hours together. The smell of onions and garlic cooking lingered around every corner of the house once again, and her off-pitch singing forced you to extract your red headphone from the bottom of your back bag. All while you discovered that you hated to forget the golden cross necklace that Tio Gabriel gifted to you for your tenth birthday. Your palms would begin to sweat as if it were summertime, dead center in Christmas time, and you would also lose the ability to breathe, left helplessly wheezing in your chemistry classroom once you realized. Then you just wiped something at the corner of your eyes and told your worried teacher that everything was just fine as a peach.

Four months after Tio Gabriel's death, your sister started to talk back again, arguing about anything and everything with your parents. She made arroz e feijão into an argument that lasted for more than two hours over the dinner table. Your father drove around the neighborhood afterward for at least an hour to calm himself down, and your mother locked herself in the supply closet, listening to a meditation video on YouTube until the angry vein over her eyebrow went away. Guitar strings notes were being plucked again, the low A notes bouncing off from door to door, and your sister's raspy voice lured you to sleep. Habitually, you found yourself sitting alone in the darkness of your room, just staring at the shadow against your wall with Tio Gabriel's voice in the back of your mind. But you never let it impact you for long, as before you knew it, you had a big smile on that roughly tugged at the corner of your eyes that felt like they were burning.

Only when eight months had passed since his death, and the tittle-tattle throughout the family about you started to reduce, did you cry for the first time. At a family dinner party, Tia Camilla recreated her husband's Feijoada, a meal that he used to spend hours cooking and then would pass out on your couch afterward, snoring the

rest of the day away. You took one spoonful of rice and the linquiça that he always just had to have in his Feijoada, otherwise, he would refuse to cook it with the pout of a child. The linquiça that you can only find at the butcher two hours away, all the way in Campinas. He always forced you to go with him as no one else would, including your father, who used to hide in the basement. Your Tio would talk about politics incorrectly in the car drive until you were boiling inside and biting your lips into a shade of fiery red lipstick. He always pushed his way to the front of the line by telling everyone there that he was elderly and in a hurry. You mumbled an apology to all the daggers directed toward the two of you as he dragged you roughly by the hand. However, all was forgotten and forgiven as he taught you to cook, how to char the linquiça perfeitamente, and told you his best stories as the Feijoada heated up on the stove. Sometimes, you ever listened to music together, screeching the lyrics in the tiny white titled kitchen until you and he were hoarse; Legião Urbana was always his favorite. Then, only then, after months, something shattered inside of you, and a wave of salty tears leaked out of you.

"Honey, what's wrong?" your mother asked before jumping from her seat and plopping down next to your seat.

"Tio Gabriel.....Tio.....he's dead!!"

"Honey.....he's been dead for months now. You went to his funeral months ago. You know that."

You just shook your head, causing your long hair to slap your lips, and then you just sank beneath the dinner table. Your parents kept trying to console you, get you out from beneath the table, with desperate looks over their shoulders at the rest of the family who was already whispering about you.

"Come on, honey. Get out of there," your father said while scratching at his beard and shrugging at your Tia Camilla. "Don't do this to us."

Your mother sighed deeply and wrapped her arms around herself, "You are embarrassing yourself."

"What is wrong with you?" Both of your parents repeated together.

But you curled into a rollie pollie bug, and you remained there by yourself until Brutus joined you and laid his wrinkled body near your wheezing chest. You woke up to the sun rising through the crack of the window and the roosters wailing the day away.

How to Fail at Journaling

Brooke Wright

First, buy a new journal, even though you already have five untouched journals at home. This one is different; this one is perfect. Now buy some new pens, pencils, highlighters, and markers. These purchases are necessary for the process.

Now that you've taken your new journal and journaling supplies home you can create your perfect journaling space. Clear everything off your desk so there are no distractions. You realize this is actually worse than distractions because now the desk just looks sad and empty. Put some things back on the desk, but only what's necessary for journaling: your pens, pencils, highlighters, and markers. But now you need to buy organizers for them. Go back to the store.

Once you finally have everything organized and placed correctly on your desk, you can begin. Choose a journal. You struggle with this task because how could you possibly pick just one out of the ten you've collected recently? Maybe the journal with the blue sky on the cover would be best. No, you're not feeling happy enough for that today. Maybe the journal with the black and white city picture on the cover would be better. No, you're not feeling that depressed. At this point you decide that you need to go back to the store and buy a different journal with a cover that matches your current mood.

While you're at the store for the third time today, you wonder if maybe you should just go home and start writing in one of the journals. How hard could journaling possibly be anyway? Oh, but look at that one with the assortment of flowers on the cover-it's perfect! Now you might as well browse through the pens, and pencils, and highlighters, and markers again.

Life Lessons

Brooke Wright

"Sit like a lady," she always said. "Cross your ankles and keep your knees together."

In retaliation I would sit with my legs spread as far as they could go. Or I would sit with my feet on the chair, knees in front of my face. Or I would sit on the floor and disregard the chair completely.

"Chew with your mouth closed," she always said. To rebel I would chew as loudly as possible. Or I would emphasize just how wide I could open my mouth before the food fell out. Or I wouldn't eat at all.

"Don't talk to strangers," she always said. As revenge, I would strike up a conversation with every willing person I could find. Or I would stay out all night at bars and clubs meeting people. Or I would stay with a different person every night, never going home.

"Remember to visit your grandmother," she always said. "She won't be here forever." To protest I would dodge her calls. Or I would avoid every chance of visiting. Or I wouldn't go to the funeral with the rest of the family.

"Apologize when you're in the wrong," she always said. To object I would simply never apologize. Or I would always claim to be right. Or I would stop speaking altogether.

Looking back, I know that she was right, every time. I'm sorry mom. I miss you.

Lemon, Rosemary, Salt: An Evocation for Eric

Izzy Harvey

"If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything."
— Gordon A. Eadie

All I know is that those who don't remember themselves when they encounter a challenge are doomed to become someone else.

It began with a signature. My husband, Eric, insisted that he should sign everything in his name because it just "felt steadier." I thought about my good credit score, my name on the will that gave us this opportunity in the first place, and even my willingness to contribute. I should have been the name on the dotted line. He seemed to brush it away, and I felt compelled to do the same, as I was sure his intentions were fine, and really, who could it hurt?

The deed in question was the rights and belongings of my late parents' estate, who had spent their lives in intimacy and isolation, but had still decided to leave their only child their possessions. They had a beloved gated farmhouse in Louisiana, surrounded by marshlands and adjacent to a private cemetery. As a kid I was too scared of the surrounding fog to even explore the twists and turns of what remained of other people's lives in the graveyard. I know now that the fog, which seemed to live and breathe as normally as I did, was just a side effect of the cool marsh water and the humidity of the air colliding.

"Do you think any extra maintenance comes with the graveyard?" Eric asked me as we drove through the gravel and gates.

"Maybe, I could take care of it, work in it. I'm not setting foot there until daylight at least."

"Honey this isn't like the "work" you did back home." He put work in air quotes with his index and middle finger like he really wanted to demean its value. He seemed to shrug and pulled the car up to the doors, where some boxes already seemed straggled and opened. The gardener my parents hired had begun packing some things up, and now there was a maze of half open boxes lining the halls.

"We meet with the realtor to decide if this place is even worth keeping tomorrow." I reminded him, to which he just nodded and put the car in park. "Any thoughts?"

That was the thing about Eric, he needed a little push sometimes to really define what his mind was working on.

"Sure. That sounds good."

The house was 100 years old, almost to the day, and the fine polished floorboards

and nick free wallpaper were the product of my father's careful obsession. When walking through the house, I see him sometimes. I think of the times when he seems so clear. He was happy. He was proud. We aren't fighting. My father wears a ball-cap that's probably younger than me but looks so old that I mistake it for an antique. He wore sneakers I bought him for Christmas, and he helped me set up my books on my desk.

My mother was distant most times, in the memories I have of her, but she's there. She wore her hair in a tight barrette, silky black and smooth and tightened up on her head. When I moved into college, she rubbed salt and rosemary and lemon juice on my door to ward off bad spirits. She scoffs when my roommate asks what she's doing and says she should be thankful someone was taking precautions in a building as old as ours.

They don't talk about the house, they never mentioned why I can never go into the attic, where we store memories, we can never retrieve. Eric probably remembers them just as fondly. He has little memory of them, as they never seemed to even leave to come see us. We always came down here to Louisiana. The first night we spend in the house, changing lightbulb after lightbulb that seemingly fried up when a breaker tripped. Eric packs up books, journals, candelabras and old dishes. I do our laundry and clean the guest room sheets.

That night I reach for Eric late, finding a cold spot on the bed where he should be. I lean my head over and find his glasses on his nightstand. He can't see without his glasses; can't see a thing.

My head drifts to the window, where the cool air blows the curtains about in an unsettling motion. Eric is there, watching the world below us on the lawn. I hear a rolling knock above me, light and small and steady: thrum, thrum, thrum. I'm sent back to my childhood, when my parents said to never leave the bed at night, no matter what I heard. My eyes close heavily, not by my own will, and I drift off to sleep.

But that fucked with me. The throttle and thrum, thrum, thrum of the attic seemed to be silent to him. The next morning, he doesn't remember getting up, but swears he has the strangest dream of a boat sailing offshore. Around lunchtime I hear whistling from the graveyard, and pull curtains back to see the fog moving in. I mention it to Eric, and he says it had to be a native bird calling out. I don't tell him I've never seen another living thing here for as long as I've lived.

That night I light candles, humming as my mother used to do when she set them out, carefully putting thought and promise into each one. She then sprinkled herbs beneath the attic, lemon zest, salt, and rosemary, then slept peacefully away. My father checked each doorknob, made of ironwood, and locked them all carefully. The lights go off, the candles burn out, and the attic stays silent.

I am so focused on our daily routine, making sure the house is tidy and all our work at getting it ready to sell or keep or tear down is not for nothing that I forget about Eric sometimes. I notice him sleepwalking at night, first to the window, then to the stairs, then with the front door wide open. He stands there, doorway wide agape like jaws of a monster, the attic being its heart. He just stares, the cool wind numbing his fingers and toes and setting his jaw firm against his skin. He always comes back to bed. I always ask him how he slept, and he pushes me away each time. I'm starting to

become exhausted with just empathizing with him.

I ask him in the morning if he believes in ghosts as we walk by the graveyard. He says in all honesty he doesn't, he thinks that people are just naturally scared. The fog from the marsh clouds his glasses that evening, and he takes them off repeatedly to clear them. The headstones are moistened from condensation, and they sweat in the Louisiana evening. It somehow gets so cold here at night, colder than I remember, and I wonder if their marbled perspiration freezes them in place, or if at night they awaken, and the corpses walk amongst us all. We pass the headstones of my parents, new and neat, with fresh Louisiana moss dangling over their markers.

"Do you believe in anything?" I ask him again as we pass a headstone whose flowers have shriveled up—black and tan and mildew infested. I don't dare move them.

He shrugs. He usually does just shrug, especially if it's about something important. "No. I just don't believe in anything I can't see, I guess. I've never had a reason to."

I thought about the graveyard, and how I didn't have to believe or see anything to know that it was wrong. It didn't seem to pull at him like it pulled at me, at least not during the day. During the night he got restless.

At night I watched him as we readied for bed, drinking tap water from the kitchen sink and staring out the window. He seems fixated on something beyond the fog, by the graveyard, but stays silent when I come to see. There is nothing there. Just fog. I look up at him in question, but he shakes it off. "You're being ridiculous with all that salt."

I do my nightly protection ritual, and it keeps me calm. Eric scoffs at me as I sprinkle the herbs by the attic, by the door, the bedroom, in my tea, and by the fireplace. He says I act like a marsh witch in the bayou, cursing and drumming up hexes as I pad around the house letting them fall through my fingers: thrush, thrush, ksshh. They scatter like a collapse of snow down a mountain, fanning the wood beneath me. I finish my tea and climb into bed, watching as Erics mug grows cold.

I tell him not to leave the house at night, but say it's because the lights outside are broken, and not because I'm scared if he goes to the graveyard that calls to him, he may never come back. He says he never gets up at night, and wouldn't think of it anyways, and I can see behind his eyes that he doubts me and my worries. He mumbles under his breath when I start to protest his disbelief again, but I stop as soon as his muffled grunts subside. That night I lock the doors, tight, more to keep him in that anything out. I hope he hears the throttle and thrum of the attic as we drift off.

We decide what to do about the attic in the morning. It must be one of us. He volunteers, rolling his eyes at my jitters. He has never believed in anything but dirt and rock and earth, anything and everything he can see and touch. He laughs at me. He grabs a ladder and ventures up, cockily remarking that attics were only alive in horror movies. He is silent for a while, sifting through papers and boxes, marking them here and there. I don't notice the sliding maple door close; I don't hear him for a while. He comes back down, a small stiff of blood poking through his shirt. He says he must have scraped himself and brushes it off.

That was his last chance. I plead for him to tell me what happened in the attic, or what he sees in the graveyard, but he assures me with an eye roll that there is nothing

to talk about. My heart stings because of his scoffing. Can he not see the mud on his shoes, the living fog as it swirls around the graveyard? Does he not remember anything about the dreams he has? His nocturnal pastimes must have some effect on him, or is he just that stupid? He sees me standing with my jaw set and laughs. He actually laughs.

"Look if that's what you want, I'll drink some of your fucking tea before bed. Will that make all this go away? Jesus."

He thinks I nag him. He thinks I should be gentler, dote on him after he's worked, give him attention when he hasn't said a word to me all day. He wants me to do my nightly rituals when he isn't there. He wants me to disappear completely.

I decide to make him a special blend that night. During dinner he watches me pour the tea into his cup and shakes his head with a smile. "My wife, the wicked witch of the bayou."

He drinks it with a grimace, but seems to power through, nonetheless. He finishes two cups before retiring with a third. He says after the second that the hot drink really grows on him. He makes fun of me, saying that this must be a bad batch. I sip my own tea, mercilessly.

He showers and readies himself for bed once again, early in the afternoon. I make him soup and tea, but he has neither. He falls asleep at dusk as I read in the study, silent and restful. I notice him snoring when I get dressed after my tea, and I see that he is still asleep. His teacup is empty, the remains of the blend of grave dirt and sugar swirled at the bottom. I wonder how long it will take tonight, but I know that I have done all I can.

That night I stay awake, book in hand, and I wake up to see him traveling down the lawn. Glasses still on the nightstand, footsteps leaving no track. By the pricking of my scorned thumb, something wicked this way comes, fucker.

How to Fail at Saying Goodbye

(After Lorrie Moore's "How to Become a Writer")

Sophia Russano

First, you must wonder if you will ever see them again. Then, hug them tightly, and hold on a little longer than usual. "We'll see each other again soon," they tell you, "before you know it." Hold on tighter because it already feels as if they have slipped away. Make sure you take one last good look at them. Take note of the crinkles around their eyes when they smile, memorize the sound of their voice so that a few years later when your mom says "hey, your cousin Corinne is getting married," you'll know that you've got to go to her wedding because you'll remember that she was like an older sister to you. Watch them walk into the airport, so you know they crossed the street safely, and wonder how many years it will be before you see them again. Then, imagine yourself jumping out of the car and running up to her, asking if there is any room in her suitcase for ten-year-old you to join her. Watch as the setting sun causes the shiny coils of her long blond hair to glint and strain your eyes to hold on to every piece of her as the car pulls away from the airport. Every day you leave the house, tell your mother you love her. Just in case some reckless driver backs into you and you don't come back. Make sure she knows she's your favorite person in the world, even if you've just had a fight with her over something silly.

Say goodbye to your dog, and lock eyes with them and their loving gaze. Hold onto that when you're out on the road and everyone seems to scream at you with their angry honking horns. Remember your mother's calm voice when a customer snaps at you over the phone and makes you feel inferior. Try not to cry. And try not to think about the day when you will no longer be able to talk to your mom, or pet your dog, and try not to dote on what you will do or how lost you will feel when your family members die. Just hold onto them.

After visiting your best friend during winter break in between college semesters, tell her you love her, too, and take one last look at her before you get in your car. Make sure you have given her at least two big hugs, so that you can remember the warmth of true friendship when you are feeling cold and alone. Always take one last look, one more glance, so you can save a photograph of her in your memory and keep it always, until you see her again, whenever that happens.

Make sure you take everything in. And realize that sometimes, old friendships will fade, and you said goodbye without even knowing it. Still, hope for the best for that old friend. Hope that they don't have to say too many goodbyes.

The Expulsion of Evil

Megan Biesecker

The birds are quiet. The animals don't move. The trees sway silently in the wind.

Jack stands on the edge of the clearing, light breaths leaving his body with puffs of smoke. He had come home from work to an empty house, lights off, just a few empty beer cans piled next to the couch, so he had come outside to investigate. But he had gone a little too far into the woods, and now he can't take his eyes off the sight in front of him. Moonlight glints off the knife thrust deep into the man's belly. Thick, red blood pools around the wound, soaking his clothes, before flowing down his waist and seeping into the ground below him, the grass already wet with midnight dew.

The birds are quiet. The animals don't move. The trees sway silently in the wind.

The scent of iron is thick in the air, shoving itself so far up Jack's nose that he can taste it, almost choking him. His eyes sting with wasted tears, and he won't let them fall; this man doesn't deserve his grief. But the grief isn't for his stepfather lying in the dark clearing, it's for his brother, standing over the body, hands coated in ichor. He stands there, dazed, and Jack takes a slow step forward, reaching a thin hand out to his brother.

"Jamie," Jack whispers into the silence. He glances at the body on the ground as he steps over it to grab his brother's shoulder. His hands shake as his eyes move over the familiar bruises on Jamie's temple, as he feels the frail bones beneath his palms, as he smells the sweat and fear dripping from his brother. "Jamie." He shakes the boy. Nothing. Not a shiver, not a twitch, not a blink or a flinch. Jack runs his hands over his brother, checking for other injuries, new injuries. The darkness of the forest and the shelter of its trees prevent him from seeing well, so he relies on his probing fingers to tell him the story of the night. He feels bruises and welts, a few scratches, the bump of a broken bone that never healed quite right. Jack lets out a gentle sigh of relief; nothing new.

Suddenly, as if something inside of him snaps, tears begin to fall down Jamie's plump, red cheeks. "It wasn't supposed to be like this," he murmurs. "I just wanted to scare him but he was drunk and he came out to take a piss so when I came around the corner with the knife it was just supposed to scare him, but he was drunk and he got angry and he came at me so I held it out and I closed my eyes and then he ran right into the knife I don't even know if he knew I had it but..." The words tumble out of his mouth like a dam breaking, trailing off when he runs out of breath. Jamie turns his wide eyes up to his brother. "Jackie, what do we do?"

The birds start screaming. The animals run away. The trees rustle in a sudden gust of wind.

Jack takes a deep breath and closes his eyes to the sudden noise. He shouldn't have to be dealing with this again. He opens his tired eyes, composing himself. He needs to

be a good example; they don't have the time not to be calm right now. Jack bends down, placing one knee in the growing pool of blood surrounding the body of his stepfather. His eyes flit around the clearing before landing on his brother's. "I need you to listen to me closely, Jamie. Look at me. We need to clean up." Jack stands up, grabs Jamie's hand, and starts the walk back to the house in the woods. As they walk through the back door, he scoops up Jamie and carries him to the shower, stripping him of his clothes. "Don't touch anything, and don't forget to clean under your fingernails," Jack says. He makes sure the water isn't too hot before he closes the flowered shower curtain and steps out of the bathroom, bloody clothes tucked under his arm. As he walks through the kitchen, Jack reaches into a drawer for a small box and steps onto the back porch.

The birds are quiet. The animals don't move. The trees sway silently in the wind.

Jack walks back to his stepfather's body in the woods. He stands there for a minute in the quiet clearing, holding his breath against the blood in the air, looking down on this man he so despised. He drops his brother's clothes next to the body, bends down, and in one swift motion, Jack latches onto the hilt of the kitchen knife and wrenches it from his stepfather's stomach. A spurt of blood follows the knife, but Jack has already turned away, using the bloody knife to cut small limbs from the surrounding trees. He places the branches around the body, gathering leaves to add to the pile. The cross around his stepfather's thick neck glints through the kindling. Soon the body is covered, and Jack reaches into his pocket. He flicks his wrist, drops the match, and watches as the blaze grows. A small smile grows on Jack's face, then he turns and leaves, knife still in hand.

The birds are gone. The animals have run away. The trees are alit with sparks.

Daughter

Ellie Fritsch

You must learn to pack your own lunch before age eight; do your own laundry, I won't ask you again; you should be independent in this world, no one else is going to do it for you; don't go to church in jeans; don't go to school in sweats; sit down at the kitchen table, so I can check the length of your skirt before you go; if it rides above the middle of your thigh you need to go back up stairs and change, because if your skirt rides above the apex of your thighs, men will see it as an invitation, and the only invitations you should be handing out are to dinner parties and weddings; eat something before school starts; smile when someone's talking to you; but don't smile too friendly, or that will be seen as an invitation as well, and you know what I told you about invitations; always be kind; when you welcome someone into your home, take their coat; make sure you get all A's, it's hard enough to succeed as a woman without a trail of B's following you; follow the example I set for you; but mom, I don't want to be a doctor; you don't have to be, but make sure you make enough money that you don't need a husband to save you; when a man follows you home from the bus stop, walk with purpose: keep your chin up, spine straight, feet shoulder's width apart; walk in a defensive stance, carry your keys like they are a deadly weapon (and they can be in a fight); a man is less likely to attack you if it looks like you'll fight back; addendum, never be so kind you forget to be smart, too; keep your head up when you walk alone, but bowed in church; on Sundays, pretend you are clean and untouched for God may forgive your sins, but most pastors won't; don't accept a drink from a stranger; don't accept a drink you didn't open yourself; another addendum, always accept a drink when it's offered, or else you'll make them angry, and bad things happen when drunk men are angry, but never raise it to your lips; in fact, maybe don't drink at all; say "no" with all the force in your lungs; make them hear you; don't scream for help, no one will come; instead yell "fire," you're more likely to get a response that way; do not let them touch you; mom, I'm afraid; I did not raise you to cower in fear; they are nothing more than men, and men can be broken too; say your prayers at night; always remember that God is good all the time; then why does He let bad things happen; all the time God is good (all the time?); yes, baby, all the time, even when you've got nothing but lint in your pocket, He is good; call home often; remember you are powerful; but never become so powerful that you forget to be polite; when you reach the top of the mountain, turn around help the next person up; the world can be dark and scary, it is up to you to see the light; forgive them for what they do to you; but mom, they don't deserve my forgiveness; no, they don't, but forgive them anyways; remember that forgiveness is not the same as trust; follow your heart, but for the love of God, take your brain with you; trust your instincts, and remember what I've taught you; study hard, work harder; make good friends; make sure they always have your back; make sure you always have theirs; be good, be safe, be smart; I love you.

A Letter to Peaky Hollow

John Goble

Dear neighborhood,

As I am sure you are all aware, the pond at the entrance of our beautiful community has for the last few years been, for a lack of better words, underwhelming. We addressed this problem as a community at the last meeting and decided to have a beautiful fountain installed to "liven" it up a bit and that was the end of it.

Recently somebody decided to fill the pond with rubber duckies, which was fine as it was funny and the whole neighborhood had a good laugh as we cleaned them out. We even had the impromptu "pond cleaning cookout" turning a boring Thursday into a wonderful evening. My genius knows no bounds when it comes to on-the-spot event planning.

However, it seems that was not enough as soon after a mystery person (or persons) decided to add a team of real ducks. This clearly violates the Homeowners Association guidelines you all signed. As such, an investigation was launched to find the perpetrator, but no conclusive evidence was found and a neighborhood fine was issued to remove the ducks safely and humanely.

I am writing to you today to tell you a few things. Item one is that I had personally taken it upon myself to put an end to this little practical joke war before it gets off the ground, bringing me to item two. All residents in the area are advised to stay away from the pond as I may have gone too far and added a hippopotamus to the pond as the end all be all. To reiterate, all persons are to steer clear of the pond and the surrounding area.

Now I can already hear all the questions you are going to inevitably ask regarding how I obtained a hippo, so I shall be forthcoming and preemptively answer some frequently asked questions. One, you would be surprised how easy it is to find a hippo as long as you know the right people like I do. Two, his legal name is Ronald, but he much prefers Ron. Three, I used a twenty-six-foot-long U-Haul truck (they can carry up to nine thousand pounds, crazy right?) to transport young Ronald. Four, "Why?" you may ask, and in response I'll ask, "How do you one up a hippo?"

Moving on, all pets should be kept on leashes or inside the house, as Susan can attest the hippo finds small animals quite annoying. Also, if you have time, we are holding a funeral for Mr. Socks the Chihuahua next Tuesday evening, this is no joking matter. If you are thinking "Oh my dog isn't small," I regret to inform you that compared to a hippo, it is in fact tiny and looks like a snack. "Oh, my dog is a guard dog!" I'm sure it is, however is your small to medium sized dog (the only sizes permitted by the homeowner's contract, section three paragraph four, under the title 'approximate dog sizes allowed') really going to scare away a three ton steam train with anger issues? If so, by all means you are more than welcome to test that assumption at your earliest convenience. You may be saying to yourself that hippos are grazing animals, and you

would be right, but they are also very territorial, and they make sure everyone knows who is in charge. A fact I was not aware of when it was added to the pond, and I assure you I wouldn't have if I had known.

I assure you that I am just as concerned about this as you all are, and I am here to tell you that attempts to remove the hippo are being made. The first attempt was made by Mark and I with very poor results and a hospital trip. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in the matter. Then I called animal control to handle the matter only for the operator in the other line to rather rudely explain to me that "No, animal control doesn't handle hippos." I was obviously flabbergasted at the rudeness and am waiting to hear an apology from them soon. I called an emergency meeting of the Association's board members to address the matter and we have reached out to a group of specialists to come handle the situation.

The final point: humans are no longer the apex predator in this area, the hippo is. I am truly sorry that my wonderful joke seems to not be as funny to some, but given the circumstances I understand you all to believe me to be at fault for the 3,000-pound nuisance. All are at risk, and I know last week when Ron went on a rampage through the area lots of property damage was caused but I am reminding you flagrant emails and phone calls will get you absolutely nowhere with me, and I do expect apologies from those individuals for your rude behavior. That will not stand in our wonderful community and just think of the example you are setting for the children.

Oh, and I almost forgot one very important thing. The police are investigating this whole hippo nonsense and I would just like to remind you all how I have been a very wonderful and diligent Homeowners Association president and it would be a shame for you all to have to elect a new one. So, if the police ask how the hippo, which unfortunately killed Mark (this would be related to the aforementioned trip to the hospital. He will be missed), arrived in the pond, I think it is in everyone's best interest to keep to themselves. I. Know. Everything. I am the longest-lived resident of this community and I hold all of the cards. When the police ask questions, I expect a certain level of diligence to be paid so that no one person gets thrown under the bus as that would have detrimental effects on us all.

Yours truly,

Dale.

The Key Jar

Connor Lindsay

It started with his keys. Jimmy would leave them in the little blue jar by the door, the one his daughter made way back in middle school, instead of grabbing them as he went out to the car. He would walk down his steep driveway and go to unlock the driver's side door, reaching into his pocket for the keys. After searching for several seconds, he'd realize they were still inside, sitting in the jar. Then he'd make the strenuous walk back up the driveway, leaning on his tennis ball-tipped cane for support. Every time this happened, Jimmy swore that next time, he would remember to pick them up before coming out. But he kept forgetting, and eventually he started noticing it with other things, too.

He would leave doors in his house open and, forgetting he had opened them, would spend several minutes hobbling around the halls looking for an intruder or a visitor. He would try to leave restaurants without paying, and stare confusedly at the embarrassed server who had to remind him his bill wasn't paid yet. He had to start keeping a calendar on his phone to remember church meetings, lunches with friends, even his daughter's birthday, things he had always prided himself on remembering off the top of his head. And still, occasionally he would see a calendar alert and prepare to leave, only to forget what exactly he was leaving for.

Eventually Jimmy's daughter took notice. They were at a café between their houses, a location they had chosen for bi-weekly lunches and had frequented for several years, ever since Jimmy's wife had passed. They sat down at their booth by the window. Their usual server, a young man with purple hair, came to their table and asked what they would be having. Jimmy's daughter asked for the same thing she always did, a Turkey Reuben, and turned to her father, expecting him to give his usual order as well.

"Could I see a menu?" Jimmy asked, staring at the top of the server's head.

The young man's brow furrowed, but he quickly recovered his polite smile. "Of course, Jimmy, I'll be right back with one."

Jimmy nodded and turned to stare at the table. His daughter craned her neck from the other booth, trying to make eye contact with him, but he wouldn't meet her gaze. His face was scrunched up tightly. Then with a surprising loudness, he spoke. "He changed his hair."

"What?" his daughter asked, tilting her head.

"The server. He dyed his hair. It looks weird."

"You mean Martin?"

"Yes, yes, him."

"Dad, Martin dyed his hair a couple months ago, remember? You told him it

looked nice."

"I... no, I didn't say that." His daughter frowned. Jimmy looked up from the table, scowling. He scanned the other side of the room. "He's taking a while with the menu, huh?"

"I don't even know why you asked for a menu."

"Well, I need to figure out what to order, don't I?"

"Why don't you just get the French onion soup?"

"Huh?"

"The French onion soup."

"Oh, right, yes. I do like that soup. I'll tell the server when he comes back."

"Martin."

"Right, Martin."

Despite his daughter's reminder, Jimmy didn't remember Martin's name when he returned to the table. Nor did he remember it the next time they met up for lunch, when he again brought up Martin's "new" hair, this time saying he thought it looked good. When it happened a third time, his daughter drove him to a neurologist's office after they ate.

They went to a small place nearby owned by a stern, bespectacled man named Dr. Munin. He talked to Jimmy for a while about his memory, prompting Jimmy to bring up the keys he kept forgetting. Afterwards, Dr. Munin had Jimmy stick his head in a strange white machine, which emitted a high-pitched buzz as it scanned his brain. All the while, Jimmy assured his daughter that nothing was the matter.

It turned out that Alzheimer's was the matter, and by the end of the day his daughter had compiled a list of different treatment plans she kept in a little notebook from Dr. Munin's office. They sat in her car, just outside the office in a small parking lot. She was holding the notebook open next to one of the many pamphlets the doctor had given her about Jimmy's condition. The rest were in a blue folder laying open in Jimmy's lap. Jimmy could tell that she was putting effort into keeping her voice even as she spoke.

"So, I think we should look into those Donepezil tablets Dr. Munin mentioned, they might slow the progression, although he did say they'd have been more effective if we'd started earlier... well anyway, we'll keep it in mind." Her voice was slightly hoarse, as if something was tugging on her vocal cords as she spoke. Jimmy just nodded.

"And then there's the other one, Galanta..." She scanned a page of the notebook. "Galantamine. But that's for dementia, so Dr. Munin said it may not be very effective." Jimmy nodded, looking down at the folder in his lap. It was blue, like the key jar back home.

"He said you'll want to get some exercise every day. He suggested taking walks, but I don't know if that's the best idea with the cane, and... Dad, are you listening?" Jimmy nodded again. But he wasn't really listening. He was busy thinking about all the things he knew now, and everything he wouldn't by the end. Now, he could remember his wife's face, the way her eyes squinted as she concentrated on a drawing or a painting. But the lines on her face would fade from his mind, and as she was no longer around to squint at drawings, soon enough he would have no recollection of any of it. Jimmy blinked, and

suddenly a large dark splotch muddied the corner of one of the pamphlets. And while, to his memory, Jimmy had never cried in front of his daughter, he broke down sobbing in her car, and she had to move papers out of his lap so his tears wouldn't soak the ink.

The next two months went by slowly for Jimmy. He tried to concentrate on every detail and keep it in his head for as long as possible, just to prove he could. He focused on the last bit of advice his daughter gave him: exercise. He started going on walks around the neighborhood, carrying his cane and sticking to the areas with sidewalks. He began noticing the colors of the houses on his street and organizing them by the name of the neighbor living there. When he couldn't remember one, he searched frantically through his phone's contacts until he found the name that sounded right. Sometimes a neighbor would be outside in their yard. Jimmy would give them a loud "Hello" followed by the name he had connected with their house. Some of them smiled, while others stared confusedly.

This continued until one day, having moved into the road to get a better look at a house across the street, Jimmy was almost hit by a neighbor's car. They screeched to a halt just in time, but it still frightened Jimmy enough to knock him over, resulting in a sprained ankle and a trip to the hospital in the same neighbor's car. The orderlies wheeled him through the wide, white hallways in a padded wheelchair.

"You're going to be alright, Mr. Reynolds," the orderly pushing his chair said, talking very slowly and meticulously. "We've just called your daughter, she told us about your... condition. She's on her way." Jimmy arched his neck to look back at the orderly. He had a nametag on, but the font was too small for him to make out.

"What's your name?" Jimmy asked.

The orderly smiled, his eyes remaining fixed on the hallway ahead. "I'm Daniel, Mr. Reynolds."

"Daniel." Jimmy repeated, trying to get it to stick in his head. "Daniel." Daniel just smiled, nodded, and kept pushing the chair. Despite his best efforts, Jimmy did not remember Daniel's name for long, nor could he keep up with the names of the other half dozen hospital employees he met during his stay.

After an initial examination, Jimmy was put in a bed with a cast around his ankle. A doctor came in to see him, a busy-looking woman who kept stealing glances at her clipboard as she spoke. Her square glasses and sharp voice reminded Jimmy of Dr. Munin. "It's just a fracture," she explained, "But at your age, Mr. Reynolds, this should be taken seriously. I want you to stay off that leg for at least a few weeks."

Jimmy shook his head. "I don't think I can do that. My daughter, she says I need to move around, get exercise. I need to walk."

"Well, you're going to have to take a break, at least for a little bit."

"What should I do, then?"

"Just take it easy, Mr. Reynolds. We can talk about this more when your daughter arrives."

Jimmy frowned but could think of nothing else to say. "Alright, Dr. Munin, thank you." The doctor stared for a moment, then smiled quickly and walked out. Jimmy didn't realize his mistake until a minute after she left the room.

During his stay at the hospital, Jimmy heard about the medication that would change him. It was a new drug on the market, created for patients suffering from early onset dementia to assist with memory retention. One of the orderlies that took care of him, whose name was Michael, Jimmy noted, recommended he ask his neurologist about it. Michael claimed that his sister, who suffered from dementia, found that it worked wonders. Jimmy asked for a pen and paper and wrote down the name of the medication so he wouldn't forget. It was called Obscural.

His daughter refused at first. She had heard of Obscural originally from Dr. Munin, who had recommended it as a possible method of treatment. But the drug was new, had been primarily tested on younger subjects, and there was a high amount of risk involved for older patients. She hadn't even written it down in her little notebook. But Jimmy had grown tired of forgetting his keys, and his bills, and his daughter's birthday. Jimmy did not want to forget. The next week, he got Dr. Munin to agree to a prescription, and he began taking Obscural.

It came in the form of a small gray pill, with writing on the side too small for Jimmy to make out even with his readers on. When he picked one up before swallowing it, something inside rattled, like a small maraca. He kept them in a little pill caddy organized by the days of the week, alongside his heart medication and his vitamins. He placed the caddy next to the jar with the keys. He was to take one a day, no more, because overdoses had been known to result in strokes and brain hemorrhages, especially in elderly patients.

Jimmy's daughter moved in with him for a few weeks, leaving her two kids with her husband in their house across town, to make sure her dad took his pill each day and never took the next day's pill by accident. But truth be told, she didn't need to. Jimmy made notes in his phone, on the fridge, and some days with a pen on his wrist to make sure he kept up with his Obscural doses. Every morning, she would check his caddy to make sure he'd taken his daily dose, only to find it empty. To gauge his progress, Jimmy created his own memory tests with the names of servers at restaurants and street signs they passed on the way to appointments with Dr. Munin.

Jimmy first noticed he was getting better when he took his pill before his daily reminder went off. When it did, fifteen minutes after he had swallowed the day's contents, his chest swelled, and he dismissed the notification with a confident swipe of his finger. He began keeping track of dates better, no longer needing to ask his daughter what day of the week it was, or when the next neurologist appointment was scheduled. Even the memories he had so feared losing, sitting next to his wife in the living room as she wrote on her tablet and scrunched up her eyes, seemed more vivid and current. He would lie awake at night and return to those times. Every detail jumped out at him like he was seeing it the moment it happened. When he slept, dreams of the day's events repeated over in his mind, reinforcing their clarity.

His daughter moved out when she saw that Jimmy no longer needed her help. He was driving again and remembering his keys the first time he went out the door, scooping them out of the jar she'd given him all those years ago. It was an art project

she had long forgotten about, but one that he apparently never had. Before she left, he told her the story around it. Her art class had gone on a field trip to a shop where they could use a kiln, and she had carved her name into the side with her fingers, despite her teacher's insistence that she use more precise metal tools.

Jimmy was telling more stories now than even before he started having memory problems. To his daughter and Martin during their bi-weekly lunches, to the members of his church group, even to Dr. Munin, who listened with clear impatience before ushering Jimmy out to see his next patient. It seemed to those around him that Jimmy was always living these stories, experiencing them again for the first time as he spoke. They were constantly flowing into his head and out his mouth, and he never grew tired of sharing them.

Then Jimmy's daughter and her family went on vacation out of the country, taking their kids to Scotland. And it so happened that that same month, Jimmy's church group took a brief hiatus as their pastor came down with a nasty case of influenza. But Jimmy didn't mind that he no longer had anyone to share his memories with. He could still live them freshly on his own. He would sit on the old couch in his living room, the one he and his wife had bought from a yard sale twenty-five years before, and he would think back on the time he spent with her and his daughter when they were all still young. Sometimes he would sit silently, and other times he spoke aloud to himself about what he was doing in the memory. He would describe the taste of an omelet his wife had cooked one morning ten years back. The colors of the peppers and the smell of the spilt oil burning between the burners would blaze in his eyes and nose. He would list off the animals he and his daughter had seen walking around the zoo for her twelfth birthday and see the way her eyes shined with fear upon looking at the boa constrictor. The memories came back most clearly around two hours after taking the pill, so Jimmy carved out an hour or two every day around that time to relive the events of his life. Sometimes he wouldn't even turn on the lights. He just sat in the dark on the old couch and talked to himself.

Two weeks later, he missed a neurologist appointment. Not because he didn't remember it -- he did -- but because his daughter had scheduled it during the time he devoted to remembering, which by this point had expanded to four hours a day. Dr. Munin's receptionist, a small man with a kind voice, called Jimmy's home phone to ask if everything was fine.

"Hello Mr. Reynolds, this is the office of Dr. Munin. Did you remember you had an appointment today?" Something about the voice annoyed Jimmy. It sounded like the voices of the orderlies in the hospital, when they had told him that everything was going to be okay. It was too slow, like the receptionist felt the need to speak leisurely so Jimmy would understand.

"Yes, yes, I remembered, but I had something else come up. I'll have to cancel for today."

The other side of the line stayed silent for a few seconds. Then, "Alright, Mr. Reynolds, we can cancel today's appointment. Will you be available for the one next week?" There it was again, that slow gentleness in his tone.

Jimmy scowled. "Yes, I'll be there." He hung up. Jimmy thought that would be the end of it, but then he received another call. This time it was his daughter, who was still in Scotland. The call was crackly, and her voice was a little distorted.

"Dad, it's me." Even with the distortion, Jimmy could sense that same condescending slowness in her voice. "Dr. Munin's office called. They said you'd missed an appointment?"

Jimmy grumbled about the receptionist under his breath. "It was a misunderstanding. Something else came up, so I couldn't make it. But I canceled the appointment, so everything is fine."

"Oh, did you have something with the church group? Is your pastor feeling better?"

"No, nothing like that."

"Oh... is everything alright, Dad? The receptionist said you sounded... tense."

Jimmy's scowl deepened. Why wouldn't everything be alright? Didn't these people know he could think for himself again? It's no wonder he's tense, with everyone treating him like a helpless child! "Everything is fine. Now please, enjoy your vacation. Say hi to the kids for me." And he hung up again, still with a dark look on his face. To calm himself, he spent an extra hour remembering, and incidentally forgot to eat lunch.

The week before his daughter was scheduled to return from her trip, Jimmy was at the point where he spent more of the day remembering than doing anything else. He never left the house; after, all, he had everything he needed inside his head. He would wake up and eat something quickly for breakfast, before thinking back on the omelet and the smell of the oil. He would try to eat lunch while thinking back on when he got his first job with the small publishing firm on Molly Street, or when his daughter graduated high school and the green banners that hung from the rafters of the gym. He would microwave something for dinner while working through a memory of his wife's art exhibit, the contemplative faces of viewers and how she had smiled while giving her speech, brow not scrunched but raised in ecstatic joy. At night, he dreamed back through the memories he lived during the day, catching any minor details he had missed. Jimmy didn't want to forget. Now, he never had to.

When his daughter returned home and went to check on her father, Jimmy's house was dark and dirty, the floor unvacuumed and the flowers in the lawn dead. All the lights were off; the only illumination came from inside the microwave, the door of which was left open. Jimmy was sitting on the couch, quietly muttering to himself with a smile on his face. "Dad?" his daughter said quietly, her hands moving to her mouth. No response. Jimmy was far away, on a trip to the beach twenty years ago, smiling at his wife as she passed through the small waves in the surf.

Immediately, Jimmy was whisked away to Dr. Munin's office, despite his insistence that he was fine. When he offered to drive, his daughter just shook her head and opened the passenger side door for him. Jimmy hadn't seen Dr. Munin in a while, having missed two more appointments while his daughter had been gone. But he remembered his office well enough to know he had rearranged the old magazines and replaced the candy in the jar on the desk with a cheaper brand.

Dr. Munin explained that this was a side effect sometimes seen with Obscural,

especially in the elderly, as they were more likely to fixate on past memories, and that this could be the start of a psychotic break. The best solution, he said, was to cut down on the dosage, as a preemptive measure. Jimmy adjusted his position in his seat and frowned at the sound of that. He liked the memories, why would he want them to go away? But a pleading look from his daughter convinced him to try it. He was to cut back from one pill a day to one every two, and eventually one every three days.

But there was a problem, one that Jimmy noticed the first day without taking a pill. The images and senses in the memories were murkier, and he couldn't stay in them for long. His church group reconvened, but he didn't feel up to going. Even when his pastor called and told him they were having an Easter party, Jimmy said he couldn't make it. Instead, he stayed home on his couch and tried to force himself back into the places he'd gone before. But he could no longer smell the burning oil, hear his daughter squeal with fear at the zoo, or see the lines on his wife's face as she worked. And when he dreamed, between the memories of his life were images of himself, sitting alone on an old couch in a dark room, talking to nobody. He woke with sweat on his shirt collar after hearing his own voice in that dream, muttering details about things he could no longer recall.

The next day he took his pill in the morning, but though he expected to be back in his memories two hours later, they weren't as strong as before. This was something else Dr. Munin mentioned: the pills took time to build up in their effectiveness. Taking them less frequently would make them less potent. Now, Jimmy found that his memories on the days when he took the pills were no clearer than those when he didn't.

A week after he started limiting his doses, Jimmy forgot his keys again. He walked through his front door and down his driveway, heading for Dr. Munin's office, and realized with horror that his pocket felt too light. He reached a shaky hand into it. Empty. It's possible this had nothing to do with Alzheimer's. Sometimes, people forget their keys. But realizing they weren't there, Jimmy felt tears build up in his eyes. He couldn't go back. Not to when names vanished in the air before him, and bills went unpaid. He rushed back up the driveway, nearly tripping over his cane. He threw open the front door and stepped into his living room. The pill caddy laid there, waiting, next to his daughter's jar with the keys still inside. The section for today was already empty, but another dose was waiting for him two compartments down. Jimmy cracked it open, took the gray pill in his shaking fingers and threw it down his throat. Then he opened the two other compartments containing Obscural and tossed those doses into his mouth as well. He swallowed and smiled, anticipating the memories he'd soon be swimming in. He hobbled over to his couch, leaving the front door open and lights turned off. He fell into his usual seat and waited. Soon enough, the overdose took effect. Jimmy smelled the oil and heard his daughter's laugh and saw his wife's face and felt his whole life all at once. The left side of his face contorted into a grotesque smile, while the right froze just as it was. A mix of ecstasy and anguish filled his soul as his brain and heart gave out. Jimmy didn't want to forget. And he wouldn't, ever again.

Swipe Right

Emily DeAugustino

So why are you on here?

Oh. *Shit*.

Do you want the actual answer?

Sure?

So... is this the part where I talk about my heartbreak? Where I talk about the broken trust that lay in shiny, crystal pieces at my feet covered in my blood? No, this isn't where I tell him that I lost two best friends, my soulmate, my grandma, and my favorite dress in the span of four weeks? What about the polaroid photo of my lover smiling with a beer in his hand and toilet paper on his head and a lipstick mark on his cheek? Y'know, the one I keep in my wallet even though I know that he's probably burned mine? Or maybe that last week my tire blew out and I had to walk to practice in the pouring rain and I'm coming to grips with my own mortality while my mask acne is getting worse because fuck oily skin, am I right? No, no, this is the part where I tell him I'm not sure and I'm going to use him just for the sex because there is a hole in my heart that I'm just going to temporarily plug to escape the quantum sized blackhole that comes from being discarded, lied about and lied to?

Oh! I'm just here to see... ;)

Cool. Me too. So wanna hook up?

Sure.

Non Fiction

Kitenge

Kenndedy Riddick

We do not use towels in my house. Well, that's not entirely true, we do for dishes, and our hands, and to clean up messes. But for beach visits, drying off after swim class, headwraps, and lounge dresses, we use large sheets of a thin yet durable, brightly dyed, and highly versatile, cotton fabric called a kitenge.

I always thought my mother had magic fingers when I was younger, the same way I thought she had eyes in the back of her head and the power to shoo the monsters under my bed away with a glare. The way her hands could deftly move to carve gowns, headscarves, blouses, and skirts out of the same sheet of fabric could only be the work of magic spells. She whipped up anything and everything my little mind could imagine from an unassuming piece of fabric with the experience of witches making potions in a cauldron. I loved her so much, I would beg for her to work her magic on me, wrapping me in her spells. To no one's surprise, she would always indulge me.

I have a favorite kitenge, though a younger me would never admit it. It was around two to three yards long – one of the smaller ones my father was too tall to use and just too large for my younger brother to do anything but swim in its fabric. However, my mom and I could use it comfortably, and I would have done anything to be as beautiful as her, including wearing her clothes. It was a gorgeous pattern of yellow, black, white, and purple flowers and dots. It also had this striped black and white border with Swahili phrases in it that made it easier to wrap than others. I had no idea what those words meant. However, that border acted as a guard so even my pudgy fingers couldn't get lost tying it.

I loved the kitenge for its versatility as much as its beauty. When it was a skirt, it flowed in the breeze and tickled my legs as if I was walking through tall grass. As a blouse, it brought comfort and support that would spark envy in most t-shirts and recognition from every tree. And as a headscarf, well, my mother could tie it strong as stone without inconvenience. I never had to worry about it coming loose when her hands tied it. The fabric went from flowing like the wind, to the steadfastness of oak, to the durability of rock. You couldn't tell me my mother and her kitenge weren't at least supernatural.

All things loved by children are loved hard. This kitenge joined me in sibling and cousin brawls, pool parties, and fighting off ocean spray. It survived bleach and food stains, with its bright pattern only slightly faded but still intact. Over the years, I saw that kitenge fray and tear. But, it is the destiny of all fabric to unravel to tatters. This kitenge is not different, but it is still here, for my mother, always with her deft magical hands, was quick to mend what she could.

I loved that kitenge because of what my mother could do with it and how it connected her to me. She loved it for that and more. My mother is Kenyan and rarely has the opportunity to go back home. In the almost 30 years my mother has been in the United States, she has only visited her home of Nairobi once. Small things from Kenya like a kitenge or certain teas are some of the few reminders she has of home. Knowing she can share them with her family, especially her children, is so important to her. Because of that, this kitenge has become even more important to me.

Handprints

Connor Lindsay

I saw a glove floating on the surface of the river in Freedom Park. A white, latex glove that will probably go on to choke a fish or an unfortunate bird looking for a bite to eat. Either that, or it will break down into minuscule particles as it washes out to the ocean, and there it will ascend up the food chain in little plastic bits, and eventually, come back to us in our Sunday dinners. I found it odd that something so harmful to the life that surrounds it could look so beautiful, so peaceful as it floated along. It reminded me of poisonous plants: Oleander and Hemlock blossoms that could kill us in a matter of minutes look just as pretty as any other flower in the forest.

The almost translucent skin of the glove allowed light to shine through it into the water, creating a shadow directly beneath it that made the shape of a hand on the muddy bottom of the river. A human handprint, etched into the earth, moving past tiny fish and waving "hello" as it goes along.

Whenever we speak about our impact on the world, we usually talk about our "footprint." But humanity doesn't just step on nature. We push our hands into it, grind our teeth against it, scrape our nails through it, scratch and gnaw until we get what we want. We fully submerge ourselves in nature, we throw ourselves into it whole-body. We kick and scream until the water is cloudy and ruined. We don't just leave footprints, but handprints, bite marks, ax cuts, and bullet holes as well. And long after we're gone, I fear these injuries will remain. The scars left by our actions will still be visible in every creek, lake, and stream.

That doesn't mean we can't try to heal the world. In big ways, but in little ways, too -- all the time. Even if the only thing I could do to help that day was pluck a latex glove out of the river in Freedom Park: I still did it. I can't mend every scar and tear on the Earth, but I erased one handprint, and that's a start.

Pick up, Put Down

Emily Iknayan

On average, it takes anywhere from a few months to a year to crochet a blanket. I'm an outlier, considering it took me four years to finish my first blanket. To be fair, I was a novice crocheter when I started this project—I still am—and I naively selected single crochet as my stitch of choice. This stitch is undoubtedly the easiest, but it also has the slightest impact. I admittedly didn't account for this when I started. After all, how could I have known?

The whole process looks something like this: Insert the hook in the next chain. Pull up a loop. Yarn over. Pull through two. Repeat until you develop carpal tunnel.

I didn't have the experience to predict how long it would take me to crochet a blanket. Honestly, I had no desire to know the blanket's date of completion. In fact, I failed to commit the day I finally finished it to memory. This is to say that crocheting is something I get to do without deadlines, between deadlines, and despite deadlines.

I was more concerned with considering what would be the optimal blanket for me. I knew I wanted the blanket to be a neutral color, so I settled on twelve skeins of yarn that were the color of oatmeal. I didn't fuss over the texture of the yarn, which ended up being neither soft nor abrasive. I was most attentive to the structure of the blanket. I like to feel secure when I sleep. I'm five-seven, so the blanket had to be at least six feet, or long enough to cover my feet when I placed the blanket over my head and really only exposed my nose to the darkness of my bedroom.

This qualification took precedence over any level of precision. My method of crocheting was by no means meticulous. I was taught to count the number of chains in each row. I wasn't even halfway finished with the blanket before I gave up on counting. I later learned that the tension I placed between the crochet hook and the yarn impacted how straight the edges of my blanket would be. Thus, with inconsistent tension and my unwillingness to count the number of chains in each row, I was fated to have a six-feet or so blanket with wobbly edges

...

I want to say my intent to crochet was inherited from my Grandma Joan. Was it actually inheritance? Not in a genetic sense. The implications of inherited traits become all too apparent each winter when the dry skin on my knuckles becomes cracked and bloodied. I inherited my complexion from her—she's the reason I already have the hands of a 40-year-old woman. Perhaps I have a fear of aging poorly because of what I inherited from her.

Are my inexpert attempts at crocheting just an effort to emulate someone I don't know and never will know?

I never got the chance to meet my grandmother, but I grew up admiring this perfect blanket she crocheted for my dad. It's always been referred to as the Grandma Joan blanket. It's a beautifully dense, cream-colored blanket with a zig-zag crochet pattern.

This blanket truly belongs to my dad. Notwithstanding our protests, he has never been willing to lend it to my siblings or I for more than a few hours. We eventually gave up asking. Was this the moment I realized that I might want to be able to make something tangible for myself and others? Or, because I was decidedly envious of this blanket, was my decision to learn to crochet a selfish one? Ultimately, I resolved that the blanket I spent four years making would be mine, but I sincerely felt I deserved it.

...

Truthfully, crocheting has never been an egocentric endeavor for me. Yes, I've made things for myself, but I've consistently looked forward to crocheting items with utility for people I care about. Somewhere in the midst of those four years, I crocheted potholders that were the colors of Christmas for my mom while Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer played in the background for the umpteenth time on Christmas Eve. It only took a few hours to produce two squares that I hoped would be solid enough to protect any of their users from getting burnt while taking a dish out of the oven. I'm still not sure if she genuinely likes them. I mean, they can't be that bad if they still have a place in the Christmas dish towel rotation.

More recently, since the completion of my blanket, I've started crocheting my former roommate a dark green scarf made of chunky yarn to shield her from the frigidity of a New York winter. Granted, last Christmas, I told her that I'd make her a scarf, but as I've said before, I cannot have an established deadline for any of my crochet projects. Deadlines are antithetical to what I want and need from this hobby. I've adopted the adage: It's a pick up and put down project. Anyone who's ever seen me crocheting has heard me say this.

Thus, there's only one scenario where the sloth-like tendency I approach crocheting with is especially fraught: when I tell soon-to-be mothers that I'll make them a baby blanket. I'm nearly done with the cream-colored baby blanket I'm making with a half-double crochet stitch, but the baby I'm making it for is over two months old now. She might be three months old by the time I'm done with it. I think it'll be time to stop crocheting baby blankets after this one is finished, as deadlines truly defeat what my purpose is when I'm crocheting.

Longing

Emily Iknayan

In the span of the Japanese Breakfast concert, I consumed two or three amber ales. I had a sip of my sister's before committing to this particular beer. When I tried it, I was delighted by how ordinary it was. Perhaps it was everything around the beer that enhanced its flavor. The lack of price gauging by Cat's Cradle was one thing and the fact that I was at my first concert since the pandemic started was another thing. I was admittedly uneasy about being in a crowded room amidst the delta variant with a bunch of mask-wearing, fully vaccinated strangers. Yet, I assumed the risk because Japanese Breakfast's album Jubilee was an album I listened to obsessively this past summer, and concert going was on top of the list of things I missed most.

A Philadelphia-based band called Mannequin Pussy was the opener—are you shocked they're a punk band? Literal screams juxtaposed softer melodies, which I appreciated as much as the next guy. Something that Japanese Breakfast had that Mannequin Pussy didn't was a gong, a staple of the song "Paprika," which the band opened with. The lead vocalist Michelle Zauner is a storyteller, so her brief introductions before her songs were artful. Her succinct assertion, "This one's about killing billionaires," segued into the song "Savage Good Boy," and she conferred how "Posing For Cars" was inspired by her husband's need to pose for cars in front of their window while on shrooms.

I was reeling by the time Japanese Breakfast closed with their sixish minute, guitar and synth-heavy song "Diving Woman." I left the venue adorned with sweat, carrying two new concert t-shirts and a pair of Japanese Breakfast-branded chopsticks, wondering what we'd be having for dinner. It was a quarter till eleven, and we had a two hour drive back to Charlotte from Carrboro. I determined that two or three beers were not a sufficient dinner, and I resolved that we had to find a McDonald's.

Now, if there's one detail to know about me, it's that I'm an infamous car sleeper. Clearly, my ability to lull myself to sleep in a car is not ideal for anyone driving late into the night on a two-person road trip, but Madeline knew what she was signing up for. Once we bested the stairs of the parking deck and beat the dreaded post-concert line of cars trying to get out of a parking deck, I opened Google Maps and located a nearby McDonald's that didn't close until midnight. Five minutes later, we pulled up to a McDonald's without a drive-thru on Franklin Street. Given its proximity to UNC Chapel Hill, I knew that a drive-thru on Franklin Street was not plausible, but I still begrudgingly accepted this fact as I stepped across a puddle in the parking lot to reach the doors of this college town McDonald's.

I glimpsed at the hours on the doors and saw that Google Maps lied to us.

McDonald's closed at eleven, meaning we arrived five minutes before closing time. I noticed the workers mopping around the one person dining-in. This scene was all-too-familiar to someone who had three years working in the fast food industry under their belt.

I finally clasped my fingers around the door handle, and to my dismay, the double-doors were locked. Listen, I get it. I wanted to lock the doors early every closing shift I had working at Chick-fil-A as an atheist, anti-capitalist during my formative, teenage years, but I couldn't. I walked across the puddle with a feeling of defeat. Still, I did not waver in my purpose of finding a McDonald's.

My goal was temporarily upended by my sister's preference for Wendy's. We rolled up to a nearby Wendy's drive-thru that looked like the gates of Hell. Supposedly, it was open until one a.m., but the ten or so minutes were spent sitting behind an unmoving line of four cars convinced us otherwise. My search on Google Maps became more general as the keywords switched from 24-hour McDonald's to fast food. Even with this broadening, McDonald's continued to be our best bet. Madeline continued on the path to Charlotte, and we only strayed away from the path for McDonald's. The next one was connected to a gas station, and we were received by the automated message that precedes the voice of an actual person. Again, we were met with silent rejection. At this point, we developed a staunch mistrust of Google Maps.

We were practically an hour into our car ride, and I had not been able to doze off once. I was much too concerned with seeing to it that our pursuit of the Golden Arch was a successful one. I never anticipated going through such great lengths to eat a Big Mac and fries. In actuality, I didn't struggle so much as the navigator. Madeline was the one who had to cut across lanes on the highway to reach an exit that had a McDonald's that may or may not have been open.

She was approaching her limit. I had one more chance to locate a viable McDonald's before Madeline called off the search. Our final stop was another gas station adjacent McDonald's. Its parking lot was lit like a stadium and had enough cars parked in it to convince me that we'd be having an exchange with someone in the drive-thru. When we finally reached the microphone, we were greeted by a distinctly human voice, and at this very moment, I relinquished all of my misgivings about McDonald's and Google Maps. I finally got to order my Big Mac meal.

An infrequent Big Mac meal is one of my vices as a part-time vegetarian, and the unboxing of this sandwich was particularly gratifying. The Big Mac is a perfect marriage of things that have no nutritional value, and I revere its shredded lettuce, which I often refer to by its familiar name of shrettuce, the most. McDonald's shrettuce is dependably damp and wilted and refuses to be restricted to the confines of the sesame bun. I don't feel like I'm eating a Big Mac unless half of the shrettuce has been scattered in the box and onto my lap after the first bite. Fortunately, North Carolina's light pollution did not shroud my ruminations on the clumsy construction of the Big Mac and the circumstances that led us to this McDonald's.

Longing is adding an hour to a road trip home to be able to enjoy a Big Mac in the passenger seat of a cherry red Volkswagen Golf in the dead of night.

Growing Up in the Aftershock - Experiencing The Second Generation

Jenna Plaisted

The second generation of the immigrant experience is often complicated and filled with a search for connection, identity, and finding your place in your community. This is something Amina Begic, a sophomore student at Queens University of Charlotte, understands all too well. Amina's family are immigrants from Bosnia and refugees from the Balkan Wars that tore their community apart and displaced thousands of Bosnian citizens. While Amina was born in the United States, she still considers herself a proud Bosnian and feels the history of her family and the struggles her parents and sister faced every day. However, she's faced struggles of a brand new variety growing up in the aftershock of her family's intense departure and attempts to join American society, while also keeping the traditions and values of their own culture that once faced persecution.

The Balkan Wars began in 1992, the year Amina's sister Zerina was born, and her parents decided to flee not long after, leaving when Zerina was only two months old. They had lived in the small town Srebrenica, which later became a key location in the war due to the Srebrenica Massacre where a mass genocide of the town's Muslim community occurred in 1995. Amina's parents and sister, and extended family not too long after, were able to escape early after seeing the beginning warning signs and traveling to Slovenia. After spending just under two years in Slovenia, they moved again to Germany due to the country's refugee protection services meant to aid people escaping the Balkan wars. After a few years, they relocated again and finally made their way to the United States after the government began providing better aid than Germany was offering at the time. Two years after moving to the United States, Amina was born in 2000, becoming the only member of her family to be an American citizen by birth.

When asked about how her American experience compared to her family's, Amina jokes that it was "a walk in the park" and she was "born here, I'm flying free, I'm good to go, you know American eagle or whatever," before becoming more serious and discussing how her parents and sister had to go through the citizenship process and begin the process of learning English. When her parents first moved to the States, they only spoke Bosnian and German because they hadn't expected to need to know English until the last minute before they decided to move. Because of this, her parents took classes at Central Piedmont Community College and her sister was put into ESL classes in school. Amina, however, says she had an easier time.

"Learning languages as a child is really easy just because you kind of just pick it up.

So my learning of English was through watching TV programs and just being immersed in society and playing with kids outside or going out to the grocery store and picking up pieces of the language. Or music or turning on the radio. So my experience was a lot better. It wasn't like 'I'm an adult now, I have to learn a whole new language whilst trying to survive in an unfamiliar country where I don't know anything or anyone and I just showed up here,'" she says.

But because her parents still spoke Bosnian in the home, Amina and her sister grew up living a bilingual, dual identity lifestyle, and often had the pressure of becoming translators for their parents. Even now, after living in the States for over 20 years, their parents have moments of struggle when the girls have to step in and translate anything from emails to important legal paperwork.

"So it's still kind of like I'm holding their hand, even all these years later," Amina says.

Dealing with translation duties isn't the only area of difficulty when it comes to her bilingual knowledge. Because Bosnian isn't a commonly spoken language in the States, it often feels like being bilingual, which is often a sought after trait in students and employees, doesn't benefit Amina in the same ways. It's not a perfect situation in Bosnia either, as she's not consistently exposed to all aspects of the language and can sometimes make mistakes.

"Here, it feels like I have all this knowledge but I can't use it. And in Bosnia, the biggest value in being bilingual, for me, is being able to communicate with my family members and the ability to still have a connection to the Bosnian community, but my grammar isn't too hot and I conjugate things incorrectly sometimes or put the wrong gender association, and I don't always know the current slang or more casual language" she says. However, she adds that she's almost glad that there isn't more of a use for Bosnian in the States, because "That would mean that people are in trouble. So you know, it's kind of a double edged sword there."

Her struggles to connect with Bosnia extend past any language barriers and at times turn to the current social issues still occurring within the country. In her experiences of visiting the country throughout her life, she has seen the subtle trends of racism, bigotry, xenophobia, and homophobia that exist within the community. Even though it's a country she's proud to be a part of and claim as her ethnicity, she realizes that she may never be able to take her best friend, who is a person of color, to visit the place that means so much to her. Her worries extend into the future as well, as she says a serious, and somewhat depressing, worry is what if she were to have children of color? Would they be able to experience the country and culture that shaped their own mother when they don't fit into the narrow guidelines of Bosnian society and culture? She wants them to be able to experience this part of her identity, but can she do that when she knows it would be putting them in possible danger? It becomes a moment of resentment towards Bosnia for creating this conflict and hesitation towards choosing between the people and place she loves. "That is a serious thing that I think about because they won't be able to walk around without being looked at, harassed, or actively discriminated against," she said.

Worries of harassment isn't a new issue Amina has had to deal with when it comes to her Bosnian identity. She grew up in a Muslim household, and while she may not have as many ties to the religion as an adult, it's still a form of connection to her family's culture. However, she says growing up Muslim in the United States after the events of 9/11 were difficult. She was raised in a country that began seeing her community as terrorists and it led to her becoming hesitant to ever share that key part of her life. Because both she and her parents and sister didn't present as the stereotypical representation of Muslim people that many people in the United States had been exposed to, they didn't face outward bigotry, but they still understood the affects of the mistreatment. This tension took a toll on Amina though, as she says "I had privilege because I didn't face persecution or oppression based on the way that I looked, but being Muslim was never something that I just brought up without being prompted, I always had to be careful who I said it around or tiptoe around it. And I hated that, that's not something that anyone should experience."

But even through these moments of hardship and facing the pressure of both helping her family settle into American culture and finding her own place in it as well, Amina says she still feels a sense of pride in her dual identity. It's aided her in keeping her mind open and accepting, and keeping her empathy wide to other people going through struggles, both similar to her family's and completely different. She may be an American by birth, but Bosnia is a place she claims as another home. She says, "I do feel a sense of pride for Bosnia because my parents are from there and went through so much with the war and trying to come out on the other side and survive. You go to visit and there's so many ruins and areas where you can see where buildings were damaged, you can see where things blew up, but people are there and thriving and living their lives. And to see a community survive through pain and destruction and come out on the other side is something to be proud of and something to reflect on. And it's cool that I can exist in these two places. I can exist in the United States and I can exist in Bosnia. Being able to participate in the cultures and feel like a part of it and that it's part of me."

To Whom It May Concern,

Megan Biesecker

To Whom It May Concern,

I have existed behind the veil of reality for my entire life, hiding myself, burying my truth beneath layers of picture-perfect personality. But I will no longer suffocate for the benefit of those around me. I write to you now, with dye in my hair and ink in my skin. I am myself, and I am everyone before me, and I know who I am. I am everything I ever wanted to be.

I write to you as a child. I have learned that people don't like what's different. I don't say the right words or make the right sounds, and I watch people's mouths when they speak. I am mocked because of my name and the way I look. I have found out the hard way that children aren't forgiving, and they sure don't forget, and I am an adult with the scars of my childhood. I wear those scars with pride, as a reminder that I am stronger than those who have done nothing but hurt me.

I write to you at 9 years old. My godmother tells me that my dreams are pointless, that I'll be wasting myself on mediocrity. She makes me doubt who I am and what I want, so I change my dreams every night, every month, every time I don't think I can do it because of what she said. I sit with her words for years before deciding to set my dreams for new heights, to outshine everything anyone's told me, to prove them all wrong.

I write to you at 13 years old. I have realized that I'm in love, and also that I can't do anything about it. She's the only thing that keeps me happy now, and I try to make her laugh so I can see the crooked smile on her face and memorize the way her eyes crinkle. I can't handle what I'm feeling, and whoever I used to be is nowhere to be found. I'm turning out to be someone new, and I'm starting to be okay with that.

I write to you at 14 years old. I wonder what it would be like to have grown up in a different family, one that would accept me for more than my achievements. I have spent half a life under the thumb of people that don't know what it's like to live, and I am finally discovering myself outside of what everyone else believes I should be. I no longer listen to the hate they spout, the love they preach but don't practice. I decide to find my own family, make one, and never let them go. They stand beside me and listen, and I understand that I can live in spite of how I was raised.

I write to you at 16 years old. I have come to the understanding that not only do I like girls, I no longer am one. It's hard to come to the realization that I'm not the miracle daughter my parents prayed for. I've become involved in a community that loves me, but it's stripped away because of a virus. I want to be true to myself, but it's impossible in this environment, so I isolate until I can get away from them and that

house. I want nothing more than to speak up and speak who I am, but I am pushed under a weighted blanket of shame, and I wait. I am fierce, and I am firm, and I will keep myself safe until I can be free.

I write to you at 18 years old. I have moved into a college eight hours away from home, a college I never wanted to be at in the first place, and I've finally recognized that my parents won't love me. I cry on my way back to my room, and I know I've finally lost the family I thought was guaranteed. But despite that, despite what they thought of me, how they believed I should be, what they told me, and how they wanted me to be, I am more than that. I am me, and that is enough. I can do everything they never believed in, and I am stronger than what they think of me.

Sincerely,
Megan Biesecker

I AM LONELY.

Megan Biesecker

And I like to think that it all began with an acorn, or perhaps a handful of acorns. We used acorns as toys in summers under the sun and every fall, when we had finished our homework with our mom, when the leaves that fell were ceilings for our acorn houses. The oyster shells that lined the path along the woods were used as boats to cross the mossy seas between rolling towns, and tree roots were ancient forests and mountains. I was never quite as lonely when we were playing with our acorns, but playtime ended too soon, and then I was lonely once again.

The next time I played with acorns was during elementary school recess, hidden behind a towering tree on the edge of the playground. I was new to school and lonely again, so I made houses for acorns and lived a life outside my own. Going from homeschooling to public school overwhelmed me, and I was lost among the new experiences. I didn't know how to make friends, and I didn't know how to keep them either, so I stayed lonely. I still have trouble with these things: I isolate from those closest to me whenever I have problems, I don't respond to people for weeks or months and expect a relationship with them, I don't communicate in the right ways or with the right words. But it's hard to know what to do around people when you've only ever interacted with your own family. I was doomed from the start. Eventually, I met people and found my friends, but I never quite fit into one certain group of people and during lunch and recess I would jump around to all the different people I talked to, but I never stayed for long.

In fifth grade, I was further isolated by the death of my grandfather. My classmates' grandparents weren't very much older than my parents, and very few of my friends had experienced the death of someone close to them. I felt distanced from those around me

because I could no longer relate to them. This loss threw me into a deeper depressive episode than I had ever gone through. Deeper than crying myself to sleep each night begging God to bring my grandparents back to life. Deeper than sitting on the swing set alone and eating alone and going home alone and living alone. Deeper than praying to die so that I wouldn't have to be in pain any longer. I have known sadness for most of my life, and while it eventually faded to a dull ache, I could never fully ignore the pain.

It's hard to exist as yourself when you don't remember what it's like to live without mental illness. I frequently find myself lost in my grief and sadness at the most inopportune and irregular times. Everything is an obstacle, but I have always been expected and demanded to be at peak performance. People always reacted negatively whenever I exhibited signs of being anything but perfectly and completely fine, so in middle school I decided that I would keep it all to myself. No one else had to know I was struggling, I had been fine on my own before. I knew how to take care of myself when I was lonely. I had learned that holding myself to others' high expectations would help me stay under the radar; all I had to do was keep up my act and be what everyone else wanted and needed me to be. But my life was a difficult play, and I frequently forgot my lines.

I had experienced loneliness and grief and depression before, tucked into my bed in a room where the darkness seemed to feed. I used to cry, quiet enough that no one would come running, quiet enough that I was left alone with my sadness, quiet enough that sometimes I didn't even remember why I was crying again. I used to dream, too, but as I grew up, the dreams I dreamt at night turned sour, and the dreams I dreamt during the day were left to die.

When I think of my loneliness, it feels familiar. I have known her for so long I don't remember what it's like to live devoid of her presence. I have grown comfortable with my loneliness. She sits next to me while I read; we danced together in my room; she would nestle in close to me when I had no one else to cuddle with. When we were sad, which happened most nights in my childhood, I would turn off the lights, cocoon us in blankets, and together we would weep for an impossible future. I find it difficult now to exist without my loneliness and my depression, how close they are tucked into my life, close as my own shadow. I am lonely, and I am depressed, and the self-awareness is crippling. I hate the necessity of dealing with myself.

I have felt the most lonely in my grief, in the sleepless nights with cheeks coated in dried tears. I have always expressed my emotions outwardly, and since grief has been much of my childhood, I am no stranger to crying. But the worst time to cry, the loneliest time to cry, is when no one else is crying. To experience such profound despair and have no one to comfort you is the deepest pain I've felt. Even worse though, is having to cover it up. I recently said goodbye to my grandfather, the only one I had left, and as I walked out of the room, wiping my tears, I heard the rest of my family laughing and joking in the kitchen. I was ashamed and embarrassed, and I didn't want anyone to see me cry, especially not these people whom I've looked up to my entire life. Not even my mother was crying while her father was dying in the next room. But how was I supposed to regulate my emotions at that time? Why did I feel guilty for not being able to perform as they were? But I don't think I was entirely guilty or ashamed

or embarrassed, I was lonely; lonely because no one else was crying with me, lonely because there was no one around me who understood that the last time this happened, the last time I had to say goodbye, I almost didn't recover from the pain.

When I got to college last semester, I decided that life would be different, and for a while, it was. I found my people, I became comfortable with myself and the space around me, and I was finally happy. Being able to exist as myself, a mentally ill queer person, was freeing. I was free from the expectations my parents put on me and those that I continued to hold on to myself, I was free from their rules and oversight, and I could finally live. Finding my community in other queer people has been the best moment of my life so far.

I am no longer the lonely kid playing with acorns at recess; I have grown and moved on. It's hard to tell where your life is going in grief, but I know that despite how I experience my pain, I have people here that love and support me, and I'll never be truly alone again. And now when my friend picks up an acorn on the sidewalk and places it on the mantle, or I crush one under my feet walking around campus, that acorn is no longer a toy or a friend or a memory it is just a seed.

Red Kool-Aid

Grant Clark

When I think of my childhood, I think of hot Oklahoma summers. I think of the lake near my house, with wooden forts hidden in the woods nearby. I think of the park, the sounds of swings and screams of children on the slides. I think of riding bikes until the street lights turned on and it was time to head home. I think of laughter and fun, of games and sports. I think of the year the Sooners won the National Championship. I think of football in the fields, of claiming that we were going to be the next Bob Stoops. And most of all, I think of red Kool-Aid. I think of the pitcher, the sound of the ice sloshing against the sides of its shimmering plastic walls. I think of that beautiful red tint, the tint of blood and wine, of ruby and rhodonite. I think of the blue plastic cups it was served in, our version of fine China. And I think of him. I think of dad in his tank top and shorts, just back from mowing the lawn. I think of his glasses and black hair. I think of his laugh and smile. And most of all, I think of his death.

I know how he died. I know how violent his final moments were. I don't know what shrapnel is like, but I can feel its sharp edges tearing into me. When I see Kool-Aid, in its raw form, I think of him. When I see that bitter red powder, I think of the hot desert sun. I think of a man too far from home. I think of desert camo fatigues. I think of sweat falling from a brow. Of shell casings falling and dinging against the hot metal floor of a Humvee. When I look too long at the raw Kool-Aid, I can see him. I see a scared face, tired eyes, no smile or laugh. I see a phone, I see numbers being dialed in and hear a distant bang. If I keep looking I see it happen. I can see the blast, I can see

the Humvee torn to shreds. And there, blowing in the wind, I see my dad, floating like Kool-Aid powder in the hot sun. I see his mist fall onto the ground, onto the bodies of his friends lying beside the charred remains of the Humvee. I can hear them saying "fuck, he really got turned into Kool-Aid powder." I can hear them every night. I hear the horror stories at the VFW. I hear his scream, or lack of scream, I should say. He went in silence. "He didn't know what hit him," they always say.

Nowadays, when I need to quench my thirst. I always choose the blue Kool-Aid.

The Light

Grant Clark

As Seneca tells us, there are times in life in which being alive is an act of true courage. For those of us who have experienced it, who have felt death's cold talons wrap around our limp bodies, who have held a knife, or gun, who have stared at a bottle of pills and seen eternity, we remember the feelings that go along with it. I remember the despair, the misery, and all of the black mist that clouded my mind when you stand over the brink. Yet for those who have stared into the abyss and returned, we remember hope. A singular thought that flashed before our wilted minds as we prepared for the long rest. I remembered a thought of home and a loved one. And that single, shining glimmer of hope was my act of bravery, it was my force majeure, my act of valor. Even in the darkest of times, hope still exists, and in those times, it shimmers like a lighthouse guiding us through the dark.

For me, the cold of January presents itself as the hardest obstacle of the winter months. Not only does the cold eat away at the thin windows, but it also drives its cold dagger into the hearts of the people finding their way through the blizzard. The gray skies by themselves are enough to bring someone to the brink, but this coupled with the fact that I would not be able to go to school due to the pandemic was enough to drive the dagger of ice deep into my heart. Without the idea of human interaction, I felt a complete and utter loss of hope. I felt as though I would be forgotten by the friends I had and that no one would reach out to me. Doom is the cold and death's sickle is loneliness. To sit alone in my room, scrolling mindlessly, clicking madly and crying endlessly became my daily routine. How could this be? Why do I have no one? I began to question my own life. I questioned my ability to adapt, I questioned my ability to be loved. As I sat in my room alone, I found no other way to get out of the situation I found myself in. I did not see that I could simply ask people to visit. I did not see that I could find another way.

No, all I saw was the void, and as I stared into it, I prepared to leap. I sat alone in my room. I didn't know how I wished to leave, but I knew I wanted it to be painless. I knew that I wanted to go in peace. I Googled it many times, I tried to find the easy way out. As I researched, I ignored the suicide hotline at the top of the screen. I believed

nothing could bring me back. I thought that I was too far gone, that I was already sliding down into the abyss. I thought that nothing could bring me back. I sat in my room with a plastic bag and a zip tie. I had read that this was just like going to sleep. It was a good way of dying, I thought. However, as I prepared to die, I felt the call of life. I thought of my mother, who had been the kindest of mothers. I did not think of the fact that I would be completely willing to die, but rather I thought of the fact that my mother would not be able to go on living without me. I was all she had, I was her life. Since my father's passing, she had raised me, she had loved me through everything. She paid for my therapy, she paid for all of the things that I loved in my life. It was my mom who cheered for me from the stands as I played hockey, it was her who would come to my room late at night to check and see if I was okay. My mother didn't see the fact that I was broken, she only saw the potential that I had deep within me. My mother was my lighthouse, she brought me back from the void. In the dark there is always a light, there is always a door that you can open to leave. You need only find it.

To see hope in the dark is one of the most beautiful things imaginable. It is like watching a lighthouse from a foggy and stormy sea. While you do not always see it, when the light shines towards you it is a beacon, it is a hand reaching out to grab you and pull you out. This light is the shimmer of love, it is a glimmer of what your life could be. It shows you both the future and past. It shows you all those who would be affected by your death. However, it also shows you everything your life could be if you stayed. When I saw it, I didn't just see my mom, I also saw my future. I saw a job, a wife, kids and pets. I saw a house and endless love. I saw true bliss through the fog of death.

I believe that this act of defiance, this final stand, is one of the bravest things someone can do. It is truly a final stand. It is a sign of staunch resistance in the heat of battle. It is a sign that you will not surrender, no matter how desperate your life seems. When you stop and let hope lead you away from death, it is truly brave. As I sat there, the feeling of hopelessness began to fade. I felt strength return to my body, and more importantly, I felt hope return to my heart. I felt hope for the future, I felt hope for who I could become if I stayed. In the cold dark of death, I found my reason to live. I found the reason I should keep going. And while at the time I cried, they were no longer tears of despair, but rather tears of thanks. Tears that represented the choice to fight on, the choice to not give up.

Lego-Induced Appendicitis

Evan Boyer

When I was small, I played with Legos religiously. Almost every day, after shedding my backpack after school and wolfing down a meal, I could be found up in my room, sitting cross-legged amidst a sea of multicolored bricks, putting together some masterpiece. What I actually built is of no relevance here, but let me just say that my creations were extremely intricate and impressive.

While digging through my monstrous Lego bin for the appropriate pieces, I often would encounter two identical flat pieces (they're called plates, and they can be had in a dizzying array of sizes, anything from the humble 2X2 to the rather highfalutin 20X20) that some mutant, probably my older brother, had joined together so vigorously that I wouldn't be able to wedge my thumbnail in between them to pry them apart (this was my standard approach for separating stubborn plates, and I kept my right thumbnail long for this exact purpose). When I hit such a snag, I would have to break out the big guns to get on with my work: my teeth. I'd put the stubborn pieces in my mouth, one end under my front teeth, the other end positioned carefully above my bottom teeth (specifically my lower right incisor) and, while holding the piece(s) in place with my thumb and forefinger, I'd give a little bite, as practiced as a doctor checking a pulse, and the pieces would almost always yield to the mighty power of my jaw, and a little crevice would emerge between them, one wide enough for me to fit my thumbnail to then pry them apart. Then I lovingly clicked the freed piece(s)—which would then be coated in a dew of drool—into place. It was beautiful; I was beautiful.

Eventually I started to wonder how much bacteria I was getting by sticking Lego pieces in my mouth. I guessed it was a significant amount; the bin that they all hung out in was huge and, since my obsession with Legos meant that it was open more than closed, was not immune to the occasional bug flying in there, and in my century-old Appalachian home, there was no shortage of bugs, many of them obscure and frightening. I'd say probably around .5% of the material in my huge Lego bin was the corpses of various household bugs, not to mention all the other crap on my floor that I swept up with the Legos when putting them up, and also not to mention all the residual bacteria from my saliva from the hundreds of pieces I had separated with my teeth previously.

Even at the tender age of eight, my hypochondria was pretty formidable, and after analyzing the situation, I quickly took up the medical opinion that by frequently using my teeth to separate these Lego pieces, I was introducing massive amounts of toxins into my system, which were obviously rapidly accumulating in my appendix

(I think I settled on the appendix—and not, say, the liver—because at that age the appendix was really the only body part I knew of that could become life-threateningly dysfunctional), and that my appendix was unable to cope with my passion for Lego building, and was therefore on the cusp of bursting, and killing me. What had been an idyllic, stimulating, and eminently rewarding hobby all of a sudden seemed as ill-advised as Russian roulette.

I should stress, lest this sound too silly, that there was nothing silly about this to eight-year-old me. That building Legos was inimical to my health was more than plausible; it was certain. The remotest pain in my lower left abdomen (I had yet to learn that the appendix is on the other side) was doubtless the pain that accompanies having an appendix full of bacteria derived from freeing stuck-together Legos with one's teeth. And the worst part was, the only activity that offered solace from worrying about how Lego building was ruining my health was Lego building. I'd build them gingerly, solemnly, and whenever I stumbled upon a piece that I needed, but was unable to divorce from another piece by my fingers and their overlong nails, I'd toss the abomination back in the bin with a throb of sick self-pity, my mind clouding over with thoughts of death.

As was my nature, I gave this worry all the attention it demanded of me. It was a full-time job. I worried at school, at home. I turned this poisonous idea over and over in my mind, obliging it, bolstering it, making it more formidable. Ruminate on something ridiculous for long enough, and it will lose that sheen of ridiculousness completely; your thinking of that one thing will be stripped of any semblance of rationality. I tried not to appear too doleful. I spent time with my friends. I played outside, climbed trees, and ate well. But whenever I got too happy, too carefree, too involved in the heady jig of life, I would be seized by that nagging fear, which warned me to not get too comfortable, because my health—and by extension my life—was hanging by a thread, and the sensation of a rapid, breathless descent in my breast would herald the next spell of despair. Something I've noticed about worrying, anxiety, neurosis, whatever inadequate word one wants to pin on it, is that the subject of one's internal torment can only get so obscenely heavy and dark and dreadful before it, despite any and all reservations one might have, simply forces its way onto the tongue and out the mouth, and this act of sharing—regardless of the response that follows—is itself a palliative; it is at this point when things begin to turn around. I approached my mother and told her about what I thought was happening to me. This was in the living room, beside the piano. She listened. Then, she said:

"Nobody ever said that using your teeth to separate Legos is bad for your appendix." Looking back, I find it very impressive, admirable even, that I wasn't laughed out of the room, but at the time I thought her response was ridiculous and ignorant. I tried to think of objections. Perhaps medical science hadn't yet looked into the matter? Perhaps I was patient zero of Lego-Induced Appendicitis (LIA), a tragic condition befalling only the most driven Lego enthusiasts? She clearly hadn't thought about it as much as I had. But even then, I knew that worrying about something for an obscene amount of time doesn't make one an authority on the matter, and also, she had survived, what, thirty-six years with her appendix in working order?

I felt better about my health, trotting away after this consultation, but I can't imagine my mother did. The fog then lifting, I went back to my Legos and started building something really kickass, without a thought in my head.

About the Author:

Evan Boyer is a 190-pound US male who routinely has nightmares involving ticks, and who has beaten cancer around thirty times, including cancer of the scrotum, breast, and brain. He has also contracted gout, polio, and various intestinal parasites. He is currently dealing with some visual problems that are probably best explained by a massive unruptured aneurysm near his visual cortex. He hopes to write more before this aneurysm bursts.

My Name

(After Sandra Cisneros)

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

My name used to be sung from house to house back in Brazil. It echoed back and forth from the top to the bottom of the hill, bouncing off every stone wall of the gated neighborhood. A song came out with my name around the time of my birth, but as my mother will tell you, I came first, and the song simply followed me my entire childhood. Every time I stepped out of the front door or tried to play out on the street, I was greeted with "Oh Anna Julia, Oh Anna Julia." Most of those neighbors have up and left, and new ones have taken their place, but I can still hear their voices as I walk past where the imprint of their shadows remain.

However, my name used to be purposely mispronounced into something that I didn't quite recognize in the United States. Before I had my first class, my father sat me down and told me that no one here, in the US, could pronounce my name. Americans could not pronounce the heavy accent over the first A in Anna nor the one in the last A in Julia. Therefore, it became a silent Ann Julia with no heavy accented A at the beginning nor end of my name. But my classmates and teachers still found it too long for them, and they shortened it to Ann or Julia.

It took years before I started to correct them like I used to do as a proud child back in Brazil. For it's not a noiseless Ann Julia. Nor does my name consist of broken pieces of my name. My name is Anna Julia with a heavy accent and all. That is how I wish to be called from this day forward.

Minha Casa Amarela

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

You still stand there near the entry gate, a lopsided number twelve dangling from your corner.

Although your amarela and laranja paint is peeling away, leaving chipped bricks behind, you are still as beautiful as the day that I met you, swaddled in a white wool blanket.

Your Lincoln green bushes are still flattened from where my head of curls laid against them, and where Pedro and Zeca, meus cachorros, sat on top with their fluffy tails wagging away.

Even the tiny footsteps of both Maria and I from our games of tag, hide and seek, or any other conjured up by our youthful minds remain there garnishing on your wilted grass.

Skid marks, scratches, and splinters occupy your pine tiles. Perhaps from all the sharp claws of the cachorros with bones in their mouths, from my sisters and I bolting away from nossa mamãe to avoid getting ready for escola, from rowdy soccer games, mainly for Palmeiras, that ended up in either tears of despair or exuberant cheers.

There is an engraving of Zeca's old cage near the right corner of your living room, the dog cage where Duda, I, and other neighborhood children used to sail away into the deepest and darkest oceans filled with menacing sea monsters.

Beneath the white bathroom cabinet in the master bedroom, you still hide shards of glass from years back when the shower door exploded into millions of cubes, and perhaps some of my blood remains buried deep into your white tiles.

Cars and motorcycles still drive beside your thick windows. The bright reds and blues that used to lull me to sleep reflect through the lacey flower curtains sewed by minha avó.

Even though they are hidden, I know that inside the closet and below the desk, you kept the carving that I made with a pair of purple scissors before saying goodbye to you, até logo minha casa, as I left for another country.

You might no longer be minha, as faceless strangers have inhabited your interior cream walls, and my world, for now, resides in the land of red, white, and blue, but you shall always be minha casa amarela, minha primeira casa.

Translation

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

Your purpose in this world is to translate; always translating this and that for ele, ela, esta aula, aquela aula, and anyone else in all the following, Portuguese, Spanish, English. You exist in the middle of the translation, switching back and forth between multiple languages, countries, and identities.

For sua mãe, sua mãe linda que you love dearly, you are always translating from Portuguese to English. Implores you to double-check all the emails and messages that she sends out to English speakers. Make sure that it's correto, filha, that she translated it properly as your eyes grow heavy and the words scramble into messy lines. Asks to confirm that she is speaking correctly, utilizing all the proper grammar techniques and rules. Is it "on" or "in" in this sentence? Which word should she use to describe que o Juca fez; "hit," "banged" "pummeled," or "knocked into?" Even though she begs you to teach her as your tongue becomes dry and twisted around itself. Change the Portuguese into English, make it make sense, translate it into something else.

For tu clase de español, you are always translating from English to Spanish, from Spanish to English, and back again, and back again. Change the English thoughts into Spanish when writing, take one language and transform into another while clicking away on a keyboard, while scribbling something out with a dull chewed-on pencil. Wonderful is now maravilloso, my name is now mi nombre es, and now repeat with all the other millions of words. Tu profesora assigns you to read a paragraph in español. Understand, comprehend the meaning, but now, translate it to el inglés out loud in class. The sentences "espero que el maestro no nos dé la tarea" and "había cantado en un concierto antes," make them into English, quick and fast, no mistakes, no stammering through. Take the español and make it into English, take the English, and make it into español, even if you can't tell the two apart.

For when all else fails, return to Portuguese. The language of sua casa amarela, of plates heaving with food that make my tongue water like a dog's, of family, and everything else that is good. For the English, the black-inked words on an older piece of text are illegible. Translate it into Portuguese until it's understandable. For when the Spanish is obscure and the words are nothing but messy lines, translate into Portuguese until you can get by. For all is better when Portuguese conquers your tongue.

But what do you do when Portuguese no longer helps, makes everything worse, makes everything más confuso? When all languages blend into each other: español into portugués, português into espanhol, and English buries all the rest into somewhere deep and dark and hidden away? What do you do when sente falta, the phrase that you

desperately need to explain the aching wound in the middle of your chest after their death, doesn't translate? For it is nonexistent in English and you are still searching through the deep wooden forest for the word in español? What do you do when you can no longer tell the difference between the language out of your tongue, el idioma written out in lined notebook paper, and a língua flowing in your brain? What do you do? What do you do when living in the translation is breaking you into all three?

Those Who Don't See Me as Both

(After Sandra Cisneros)

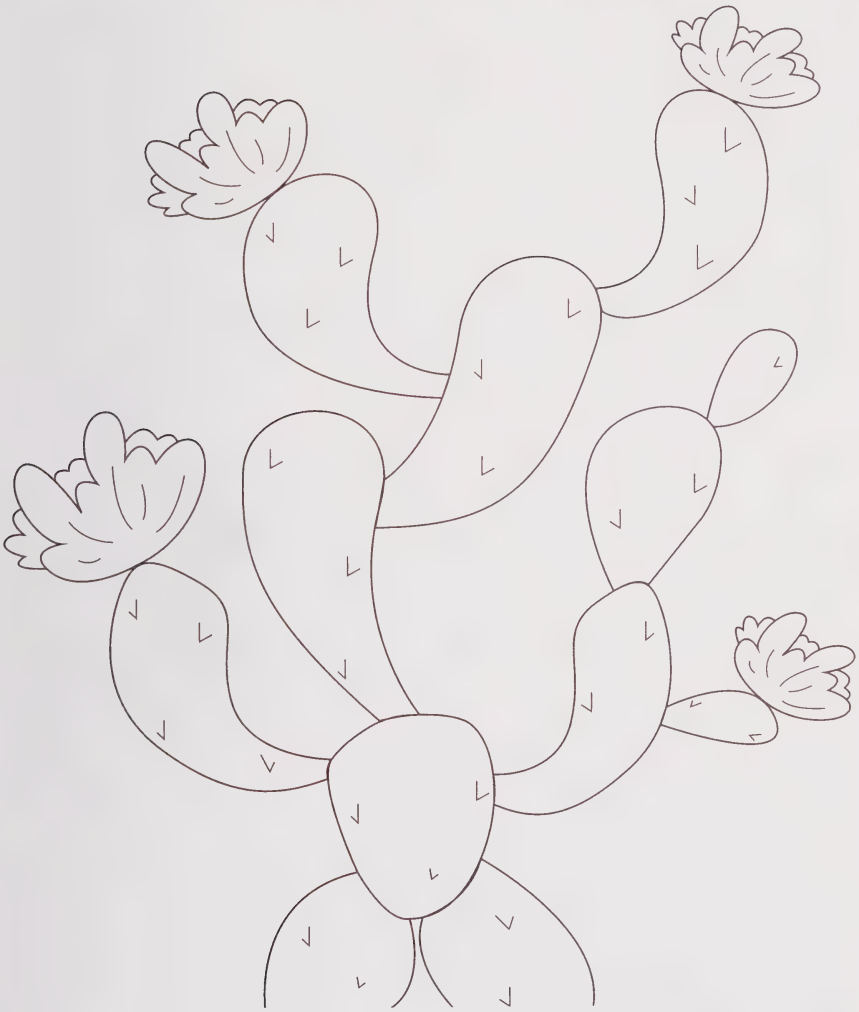
Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

To them, those in Brazil, I'm the americana, americaninha, who speaks inglés. To strangers on the stone streets, I am the prima, sobrinha, nieta who lives in the United States, erasing that I was born in the land of yellow, blue, and green, not red, white, and blue. There, miles from the expiring Amazon rainforest and behind a backyard of monkeys and bats, I remained for years, nine years in fact. They taunt my lack of knowledge, the information missing from my lexicon. For the days of the week only come out in inglés, and the salgados behind the glass display are nameless, no matter the million times they were snapped in my direction. They mock me for my mispronunciation in a language that feels more theirs than mine. I never learned the CL sound properly; Clara, claro, plateia, prato are constantly misspoken when it's coming out of my tongue. Now, try to sound it out, they tell me, try to pronounce the word like us; speak like a Brasileiro.

To them, those in the US, I'm the Brazilian living in their home of apple and pumpkin pies. Associating me with carnaval of bright colors and dancing women, Rio de Janeiro although I've never been, and the Amazon rainforest, dying to be saved. They asked how I managed to move here, did I row by myself on a wooden boat with a paddle through the Amazon River and pass the Atlantic. Questioning if I had a pet jaguar back home or even watched television before reaching the northern side of America. They begged to know if I was related to Neymar; even a distant cousin they would accept. Always wanting to know how to pronounce their names in Portuguese, and even more, curse words from my country that would make a sailor blush. They mock my family's accent, never understanding one word out of its proper place and training me to speak like them. Speak like an Americano, they tell me, speak like us.

To them, those in the world, my identity is singular, at times even less than that. I am never part, never an equal member, of the two nations that I call home.

CRITICAL WRITING



A Face Only A Mother Could Love: Eve's Lament and Loss in Cain and Abel

Lara Boyle

"When Eve walked among the animals and named them—nightingale, red shouldered hawk, fiddler crab, fallow deer— I wonder if she ever wanted them to speak back, looked into their wide wonderful eyes and whispered, ``Name me, name me." With her poem, "A Name," Ada Limón explores the inner desires of Eve as she wanders around the Garden of Eden after creation. In this version, the first woman names the animals instead of her husband Adam, and recognizes the inherent power in naming. She longs to have the choice of being named because it was taken from her the minute God designed her from man-for man, and craves the real forbidden fruit of independence. Eve is one of the most recognized women in human history. She's a multidimensional female archetype who symbolizes desire, rebellion, guilt, and original sin. The fundamental woman, daughter, wife, and mother, she carries a heavy weight on her shoulders. So one can only imagine how she felt after her son Cain killed his brother Abel.

When Bibical scholars study the first human murder, they often look at it from a male gaze. Once upon a time there were two brothers, the sons of Adam and Eve, who each yearned for the affections of their Heavenly Father. They make sacrifices to honor their father to win his good will. As the boys kneeled before the Lord on a pink altar, each presented their own personal offering: a bundle of wheat from the farmer named Cain, a young lamb from the shepherd Abel. While Abel was favored by God for his sacrifice, Cain was shunned, and, overtaken by revenge, famously murdered his sibling, his own flesh and blood. Furious with this unjustifiable act, God exiled him and marked his skin to ensure that if he were killed, the killer would suffer his wrath. Eve's curse was never uttered: given no power to change it, she would witness her beloved sons turn against each other through fatal violence, then lose them both in different ways-forever. On a surface level, Cain and Abel is a simple morality tale that personifies the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Yet it becomes less simple when we question why God would create mankind, give them a strict commandment, and allow them to disobey him with free will. Were they destined to do so in order to prove a point? Was it their genuine decision? Say God did create man with free will and allowed the murder to take place, who should be really held accountable? The Son, or The Father? According to University of California Davis researcher, Dr.Kristin Hansen Languatta,

"Growing up means more than learning the rules you must follow. It means learning which rules you can break." As such, Cain and Abel, like most siblings, are born with different predispositions and natural instincts. Perhaps God knew Cain would be more inclined to test the limits when he didn't get his way, which was why he needed to let the events unfold the way they did, so he could learn the ultimate lesson.

However let us now consider their mother. In the beginning of Genesis 2:4,only once he recognized Adam's loneliness, did God say "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." And God breathed life into the animals to see what he would name them. However their different special variety prevented any true connection from being formed. So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and while he rested unconsciously, took one of his ribs, then closed up the hole with flesh, and brought her to the man. Adam announced to the world " "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2:4, 23) It concludes with the image; (25) "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

Carl Jung recognized this original state as the first stage of the anima- referring to, in his school of analytical psychology, a part of his theory of the collective unconscious. Here Jung described the animus as the unconscious masculine side of a woman, and the anima as the unconscious feminine side of a man, each transcending the personal psyche. He fittingly named the anima Eve. Eve represents the "Object of desire, provider of nourishment, security and love."

Eve was the physical incarnation of Adam's desire to have a helper. After she gave birth to Cain and Abel, she became the sole emotional provider of their nourishment, security, and love, though the power in the family always remained with Adam as a strong, physical paternal guide in their lives. He led them to figure out what work they would do. Cain became a farmer, while Abel is a shepherd. Even these career choices reveal hints about the boys' moral character.

In Genesis 4:4, this is revealed when God does not accept Cain's fruit based sacrifice from soil. "In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."[d] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (9) Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?""I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Being a farmer requires direct, physical contact than being a shepherd. It requires you to get your hands dirty, plant seeds and pull objects from the Earth with a rough demeanor. A shepherd moves the sheep with a more gentle direction, since the animals don't need much discipline. These occupations suggest the path each boy will go down in their near future. However Cain didn't know this, and had no idea why God would reject his offering, because he worked just as hard as Abel to get it. But God suggests

he did not "do what is right." , which explains why he was not accepted. Cain may have figured he would never do what is right in his fathers eyes, and wanted to get back at his dad because he believed he would never be accepted.

Research from healthline.com shows how "Children often seek attention from parents, peers, or other authority figures. If they don't get the positive attention they want, they will act out to get negative attention.." Pritchard attests that "Common issues that cause a child to act out include:Attention issues: Children often seek attention from parents, peers, or other authority figures. If they don't get the positive attention they want, they will act out to get negative attention.Desire for power: Children often feel powerless. They're usually unable to control their situations and environment. They act out because it allows them to feel in control of their actions. Self-esteem issues: Children who believe they're unable to perform a task may act out to distract a parent." Almost all of these apply to Cain's experiences in the classical Biblical narrative.

Cain felt no guilt since in his mind he was doing the right thing. Eve, on the other hand, felt no shame while she still walked naked with Adam, before she bit the forbidden fruit. Though it's psychological effects on her after Cain Murders Abel can be interpreted from her previous actions in Genesis, when she spawned the original sin. Surely she would feel like she brought this upon not only Abel, who suffered at the hands of sin, but his brother, who followed in his mothers footsteps and rebelled against the rules set out for him.No matter how much his father disapproved of him, however, Eve mourns Cain despite this evils, for she lost his innocence, his childhood, his identity as her own offspring. In Life of Abel, (16-17), Symmachus writes that "She laid her hands on her head, and from her mouth there poured forth incessant wails. She opened her mouth and uttered in a grief stricken voice a lament over her two sons: "Abel, my dearest one, went forth yesterday and he is no more, and as for Cain, in whom I hoped to find comfort- his death would have been far more preferable to me than his life. My beloved, the beloved of his father is no more, and as for Cain, whom I acquired,- it would have been better had I never acquired him. What will become of me? My youngest son is no longer, while the one who is left is staggering while still a youth, and before his youth is up his limbs are shaking and trembling." Robert C. Gregg continues this thought in ``Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims", with the observation that "Eve collapses into a grief frenzy, tearing her hair, biting her arms, and striking her own face until "blood ran down from her cheeks." In another disconsolate outburst, she laments her double plight. Looking at either son fills her with bitterness." It can be argued, then, that Eve actually faces three losses: her two sons, and whatever was left of her sense of self.

Cain and Abel have many lessons to teach society about the nature of good and evil. Abel gave up his obedience and most worthy sacrifice to God, while Cain picked whatever fruits of his labor he could find, without much thought or intent, so his carelessness was rejected from the start- and it led him to jealousy, anger, and violence, each which is considered a different sin. The death of Abel also introduces us to the first instance of familial grief in the Christian Bible, specifically how the first couple copes with Abel's tragic murder, and their other son- the tragic murderer. But while the focus typically goes towards the male gaze, we must consider Eve's lament in order

to understand the deeper tragedy at stake. Through the female gaze, the first murder from Eve's perspective reveals the true curse: when blamed for all of humanity's sins, she felt responsible for the injustice of Cain and Abel, even though the true injustice was her lack of autonomy, powerlessness, and emotional unbecoming. She would grieve not only the loss of her sons in separate yet equally painful ways, but her sense of self, which was never truly her own.

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Reflecting on *Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair)*.

Astrid Bridgwood

When observing the images selected for gallery presentation in the Bank of America exhibition, I was immediately drawn to Peter Hujar's Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair), (Fig. 1 on page 115) a gelatin silver print from 1981. This image is dynamic, depicting a young woman's face turned to the side with the focus solidly on her wild head of dark, curly hair. You see a sliver of her face, half-lit— an eye, a slice of nose, her lips—and this half-light serves to emphasize the texture of her hair. At the center of the image, where her curls are the most dense and her head is cast in shadow, there is a plane of reflective darkness. Her wild, unkempt (yet somehow still stylish) curls are seen in silhouette, tendrils escaping from the photographer's center shadow. Hands pull at her— one of her ringlets pulled taut by a disembodied hand entering from the left, which could be her own but could just as easily be the hand of another. It, too, is silhouetted against this light, with a center shadow and implication of skin, light at the edges. Near-imperceptible lines trace its firm grip; balancing this, across the image on the right, another hand (knuckles facing outward, tendons flexed, a little out of focus) reaches for a second strand.

The image created is intimate— her closed eyes, half-turned face, her body stark but warm, almost near to the viewer against this harsh light. Her white-button down is a little rumpled; the wrinkles and folds brought forth by the same shadows delineating her face and those hands; soft gray disruptions in sunlit fabric. It is as if she is sat in front of a window— the resulting image is a symphonic variation of line, texture, and light. The location is not specific: her figure is cast against a simple gray wall. The subject is not her environment; as viewers, we are clearly intended to focus on the fact of herself and her body, the moment she is caught by light, by the hands reaching for her.

On a more personal level, I was immediately drawn to this piece because of that play of light and texture. Hair and fabric, and the way light interacts with these two very distinct surfaces, are particularly visually engaging to me. These stark light-dark shadows and her powerful silhouette evoked a kind of chiaroscuro. This contrast created by her body and hair against this unevenly distributed light, shimmering as if through glass, reminded me of the vivid contrast of silhouetted subjects against backgrounds created by painters like Johannes Vermeer in Girl with a Pearl Earring (Fig. 2 on page 115). Whereas the subject of this portrait photograph is looking away from the camera, allowing the hands to reach for her and the viewer to take her in

uninterrupted, the "Girl," of Vermeer's painting looks directly and boldly at the viewer, almost challenging us. However, the delicate light-dark variations seen in the folds of fabric in her headdress; her turned face and parted lips does bear similarity to Hujar's Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair).

This tradition of female portraiture is common throughout history; there is a kind of submission as much as there is intimacy and trust in turning away and letting yourself be observed as Lynn Davis does, just as there is an intimacy in capturing and holding the viewer's gaze, as Vermeer expresses. The similar familiarity of both of these subjects is not just in their womanhood, but in the momentary nature of the piece— this is a second in time eternally suspended. Light will never interact with Lynn Davis's hair and skin in this way again; Vermeer has caught a moment of a girl looking back in the same way Hujar trapped Davis between breaths as her eyes slid closed. Whereas Vermeer has created an intimate image of a poised and almost elegant woman, the elegance of Hujar's subject is in her humanity, her lack of perfected poise— even with her collar unbuttoned, her hair left to fly, she is blessed (made doubly beautiful) by light.

That honesty of her hair, left to fly and curl freely, is what made me walk towards this piece and look closer. The hands, the way light falls on her skin, clothes, and hair is what kept me looking— and the intimacy of her closed eyes, her face kept half-obscured from my gaze is what led me to explore this piece. Space was created for me to look, and so I have sat: looking, waiting for her to open her eyes and glance back.

Relevant Images

Fig. 1: Hujar, Peter. "Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair)." The Peter Hujar Archive, The Peter Hujar Archive, 1981, http://peterhujararchive.com/ images/eph_0615-2/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2021.

Fig. 2: Vermeer, Johannes. "Girl with a Pearl Earring." Mauritshuis: "Girl with a Pearl Earring," Mauritshuis, 1665, https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/670-girl-with-a-pearl-earring/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2021.

See Figures 1 and 2 on page 115.

From Outcast to Queen: The Gothic Female Power of the Queendom in Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Sophia Russano

In so many female gothic novels, women have no power and must learn to operate under the patriarchal social class system, yet they are expected to make a comfortable life for and nourish their families. So how do women in these novels gain power? How do some of them end up with social and economic agency outside of these patriarchal systems of power? I examine these questions in relation to the American gothic novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson. For context, the novel focuses on two sisters who live in their family mansion amidst a town that fears and hates them after one of them (Merricat) poisons the rest of the family. Merricat, the younger of the two sisters, must protect the house and her older sister Constance from their cousin Charles Blackwood, who enters their lives in an attempt to take over the Blackwood estate and inherit the wealth contained within it.

In this paper I reveal how Merricat gains power and agency by constructing what I call "the queendom," a term I define as the female version of a kingdom, or a home that is structured and ruled by women. I will explore this notion of the queendom in conversation with scholar Susan Fraiman's concept of "desperate housekeeping," an obsession with the home and its upkeep. In addition to desperate housekeeping, Merricat gains power in this novel by recapitulating the male world for her own goals and connecting with the moon, an element of nature that literalizes her ideal life. She operates within her own social network, the female gothic, to maintain her desired amount of social distance and isolation from the outside world. In doing so, her queendom has the necessary boundaries needed to preserve the safety she's worked so tirelessly to create.

We Have Always Lived in the Castle is a novel rooted in housekeeping and preservation, which only adds to the strong foundation of the Blackwood mansion. This preservation is generational, as Merricat informs us, "... as soon as a new Blackwood wife moved in, a place was found for her belongings, and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world," (Jackson 1). The idea of a wife becoming part of the man's property is a traditional idea, but Merricat is saying that it is the women of the family that keep the household steady and afloat. Indeed, readers soon find out that, "the entire cellar of our house was filled with food. All the Blackwood women had made food and taken pride in adding to the

great supply of food in our cellar," (Jackson 42). I want us to see here that there is a great emphasis on the importance of food in this novel, and since the making of food is gendered female, women are already established as significant and respected. Granted, the preservations are located below the house in the cellar, so this implies female oppression and foreshadows an overthrow of male power brewing below the surface.

This preservation is a part of the housekeeping Merricat and Constance undertake daily. Susan Fraiman, in her insightful chapter entitled "Shelter Writing: Desperate Housekeeping from Crusoe to Queer Eye," described this obsession with housekeeping this way: "For these characters, who are outsiders to polite society and at times literally out of doors, domestic spaces and domestic labor mean ... safety, sanity, and self-expression: survival in the most basic sense," (Fraiman 25). Merricat constantly checking to see if the front door is locked and mending the fence that sets a boundary between private and public property, allows her to feel safe. She is also expressing herself as the protector and leader of her house, since she is taking care of her queendom to ensure its survival. Most importantly though, she is protecting her older sister Constance, who she imagined as a "fairy princess" (Jackson 19) when she was younger. The queen protects the princess, and we can see a maternal relationship between Constance and Merricat here. Lynette Carpenter, in her article "The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson's '*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*,'" states "Constance has always felt a responsibility to take care of Merricat, to be a kind of mother to her, so Merricat has always felt a responsibility to protect Constance from an outside world her sister has not clearly understood, a world of hatred and violence," (Carpenter 4). Since the murder trial, Constance has never left the house, and Merricat goes into town to conduct business with the village, so she knows what the people think of them and endures harsh treatment so that Constance doesn't have to. The sisters take care of each other, but Merricat assumes the more "male" roles of the house. This sense of desperate housekeeping will resurface when a toxic male figure, Cousin Charles, enters the Blackwood mansion and proceeds to sully Constance and Merricat's lives.

Even before the arrival of Cousin Charles Blackwood, Merricat had magical safeguards put in place around the property. She buried objects, many of which belonged to the men of the family that had monetary value so that she, Constance, and the house would be protected. Yet it is only just before Charles arrives that Merricat: "... found a very bad omen, one of the worst. My book nailed to a tree in the pine woods had fallen down. I decided that the nail had rusted away and the book – it was a little notebook of our fathers, where he used to record the names of people who owed him money, and people who ought, he thought, to do favors for him – was useless now as protection," (Jackson 53).

I want us to take special note of Merricat's repurposing of old objects here. This account book, which is representative of her father and the patriarchy of the family, has been destroyed with a nail and put to another use. In a way, it is as if Merricat's dead relatives are serving her now, which flips the parent to child and man to woman binaries. She is recapitulating the male world for her own benefit (protection) or in other words is using male items to advance female goals of domestic safety and stability.

Since Charles's arrival broke Merricat's foundation, she needs to find new items to protect herself, Constance, and her home from him. She settles upon her late father's golden watch chain, an item of value to the greedy Charles, who works to dismantle Merricat from her position of power in the house and reinstate the patriarchy. "I thought that it [the watch chain] had earned a place up high, where it could sparkle in the sunlight, and I decided to nail it to the tree where the book had come down" (Jackson 76-77). In this scene, Merricat uses the gothic environment she inhabits to scare and threaten Charles into leaving. She makes it abundantly clear that she has no respect for him or anyone else in her family that valued wealth and power, so she takes objects that represent these things and hides them away, buried in the ground much like her dead relatives. With the taint of the patriarchy cleared from her house, Merricat is thus able to be more empowered. She specifically chooses to nail the golden watch chain to the tree so that Charles would see it. This was one of her many warnings to Charles that, if he did not leave, she would continue along this path and see to it that everything he valued would be destroyed.

Lynette Carpenter points out that the Blackwood sisters "value objects as artifacts from the domestic history of the Blackwood women (a respect they do not afford [to] masculine possessions)" and that the Blackwood men's "highest regard is reserved for money, a thing of no intrinsic value," (Carpenter 2). This leads me to continue my discussion of desperate housekeeping, as Merricat views the destruction and disposal of certain household items as "neatening" the overall atmosphere of the house and creating a more protected and comfortable home space. After receiving a threat of disposal from Charles, Merricat "ran back into the house and straight up to our father's room, where I hammered with a shoe at the mirror over the dresser until it cracked across," (Jackson 80). She is smashing something that is not only representative of her father, but also of how visible and real the threat of the patriarchy is to her. In mirrors, one can see themselves, and the fact that she destroys her father's mirror cleanses away any remnants of him in the house. She also has taken the ability of viewing away from Charles, who has been inhabiting the room. This plays into Merricat calling Charles a "ghost" and taking that visibility away renders him irrelevant and powerless against her. Smashing the mirror is Merricat's desperate attempt at neutralizing a threat so she can sleep soundly, which ironically is what she proceeds to do straight after. Susan Fraiman describes the housekeeping this way:

"In my renderings of domesticity, the interior is always pushing back against a threatening exterior; the 'private sphere' is never sealed off from but is always produced and interpenetrated by the public. This is, indeed, definitional to shelter writing, which describes the effortful creation of a private space by and for those who have been battered by the outside world," (Fraiman 35).

For our purposes, Merricat is creating this life for herself and Constance because of the way her family treated her and of how the outside world "battered" her and Constance after the trial. The treatment and pain she endures helps create this private sphere, and when Charles is trespassing on it, she is going to do everything she can to ward off his greedy and domineering spirit. She is taking control of a situation that could potentially topple everything she has built after killing her family. So, in other

words, she is controlling household items to remain in control of her house.

In this war for the queendom, Merricat initiates one final battle to drive out Charles forever: "I brushed the saucer and the pipe off the table into the wastebasket and they fell softly onto the newspapers he had brought into the house" (Jackson 99). We can see that Merricat is disposing of an ancestor's saucer as well as Charles's pipe and this further emphasizes that his presence is tainting things and that anything he touched must be disposed of. She takes note of the masculine things Charles brought into the house (the newspaper) which tells us that she seems to know that this act will start a fire. This also adds to how Merricat views the world; not only is Charles trespassing, his items are, so to take control of the situation and restore order to the Blackwood mansion, everything must be destroyed. In turn, this will drive out Charles physically and will eradicate his sullying presence, along with the ghostly presences of the deceased Blackwood family members. Once this is done, Merricat can ascend to the throne.

Merricat interacts with nature throughout the book, especially when she is checking on and setting up new magical safeguards for the house, but her favorite natural element is the moon. The moon literalizes her ideal of a perfect life, because it is far away from the people of the earth, much like she wishes to be far away from the people of the village and her patriarchal family. She considers the moon her safe space, and thinks of it whenever she feels threatened by the villagers, including the moment in which she and Constance are hiding in the front bushes during the town's pillage of their house. "I am on the moon, I thought, please let me be on the moon" (Jackson 106). The moon serves as Merricat's anchor or grounding technique, because immediately after this, she realizes the villagers are coming very close to her and Constance and knows she has to guide Constance to her hiding place by the creek. Not only does the moon allow Merricat to stop and reflect on what to do next, it helps calm her down and clear her mind enough to make a decision and act upon it.

Once the fire has been put out and everyone is gone from the house, Merricat ascends the throne and has a bit of a coronation in her mind. "... bow your heads to our beloved Mary Katherine, I thought, or you will be dead," (Jackson 111). This echoes the scene in which she visits the abandoned summer house and imagines her family adoring, serving, and respecting her, which is reminiscent of her trauma because in actuality, they regarded her in a completely opposing manner. Only after she has this "coronation" does she tell Constance,"'We are on the moon at last'" (Jackson 112). She doesn't feel safe until she ensures that any memento of her family or Charles is gone and establishes herself as the head of the household. Shelley Ingram and Willow Mullins's article "Would You Like a Cup of Tea?: Food, Home, and Mid-Century Anxiety in the Later Novels of Shirley Jackson" bring up an interesting point that "This destruction, however, leads to what may be seen as Jackson's happiest ending, at least for Merricat, as the two sisters make a home in the remains of their house and exist on the offerings of food left by guilt-ridden townspeople, the tithes of a new feudal peasantry" (Ingram and Mullins 8).

I want us to focus on the phrase "a new feudal peasantry" here, because this shows the power Merricat wields not only over her own property but the entire town. I had

previously never considered this, but everyone now serves her and Constance. The women do the work of cooking the food, and the men are the messengers or servants who deliver it to the Blackwood mansion. Merricat has successfully overturned the binary of men and women here, because in her queendom, women build the foundation, nourish the people, and maintain order, while the men are mere servants barely allowed to live there. They are treated as Merricat once was, invisible, powerless, and largely ignored.

I felt that this novel was important in showing the fight against female oppression and the fact that women are incredibly resourceful when it comes to the goal of becoming the master of their own lives. The female gothic may be tight and claustrophobic for some, but for others, like Merricat, it is an ally, aiding her in taking control of her life and protecting her from the harsh patriarchal society she lives in. This idea can be traced all the way back to *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, in which our protagonist found loopholes in male-dominated systems where she could take action to create a better and more comfortable life for herself. Female power comes from the sheer determination to exert control over one's life and the belief that they deserve to be freed from the chains of the patriarchy. I wanted to leave you with the idea that sometimes, in order to clean up and get what you want, you have to make a mess of what you already have.

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Wonder Woman, Steve Trevor, & Lois Lane: Surprising Harbingers of Feminism in the Golden Age

Kennedy Riddick

Either the love interest or career girl and ever the damsel in distress, the women of comic books' Golden Age lived as secondary characters to hypermasculinity. However, these depictions of women that would be misogynistic today were considered controversial for the time. Contemporaries cried out in fear of spreading lesbianism and juvenile delinquency. Detractors of women reading comics and depictions of superheroines did not solely fear creating girls who would be horrible homemakers, but also creating women with autonomy.

The Golden Age of comics was an experimental era. While masked vigilantes and caped crusaders paraded pulp magazines, the fledgling "superhero" had only a working definition. And with the genre maturing alongside World War II, the Great Depression, and the revitalization of American feminism, the medium introduced progressive feminist values to young readers via the contrasting characters of Wonder Woman, Steve Trevor, and Lois Lane.

Previously represented most often as damsels in distress, the women of Wonder Woman run the show. They were working, educated women-- leaders in their own right-- who relied on themselves or each other for rescue. In her essay, "The Great Women Superheroes" Trina Robbins wrote, "Wonder Woman as written by Marston is, like Paradise Island, a women's world. Women are always the strongest characters in the stories" (Robbins 56).

In the Sensation Comics' second issue, Nazi spies capture nurse Diana Prince and Captain Steve Trevor. While Wonder Woman easily escapes, she needs backup to rescue the injured captain. She enlists the help of her plus-sized friend Etta Candy, and together they recruit, "America's first expeditionary force! One hundred beautiful athletic girls" ("Doctor Poison" 9). On their way to rescue Steve, the women chant, "Who's afraid of a man? If they're men, we can catch them" ("Doctor Poison" 10). The women show no fear. Instead, they show excitement, leaping into danger and efficiently suppressing the Nazi threat. Diana did not seek out a gutsy boy-child sidekick or brave the trouble alone. She found help in her female peers to save her damsel in distress, a dashing male army captain.

These moments are why Wonder Woman received the most ire from critics at the time. She represented a role-reversal from her neighboring comic superheroes. Strong

and feminine, Wonder Woman embodied what many viewed as an oxymoron from her first appearance. She has worked to bring that strength in feminine independence to children since conception. In the "Battle for Womanhood," Wonder Woman and Steve Trevor liberate the evil Dr. Psycho's wife from his subjugation. His wife laments, "Submitting to a cruel husband's domination has ruined my life! But what can a weak girl do?" Wonder Woman responds, "Get strong! Earn your own living-- join the WAGS or WAVES and fight for your country! Remember the better you can fight the less you'll have to!" ("Battle for Womanhood" 16). Her first instinct was to encourage this victim to seek out independence and autonomy.

Feminine solidarity was just as intrinsic to Golden Age Wonder Woman as Wonder Woman herself. Her origin on Themyscira, a refuge from the, "...hatreds and wars of men in a man-made world," provided a foundation that made the Princess of the Amazons a luminary for superheroines and humanitarianism ("Wonder Woman" 1). Because of this, she was different from all her predecessors. She had never encountered men, and thus, was free from the pressures of 1940s sexism until her departure when a certain Steve Trevor washed upon her shores. The sisterhood provided by Themyscira, and later by the Holliday Sorority, allowed girls the fantasy of a haven untouched by the male gaze and a relatability in the form of relationships that could remind them of their own outside of Four-Color-Processed newsprint.

Strong superheroines were the largest source of fear for American traditionalists, but male damsels in distress, lately referred to as "distressed dudes," did not hold as much weight in the national conversation. Even so, Steve Trevor represented an opportunity for William Marston, a creator of Wonder Woman, to display feminist masculinity. It was the subversion of gender roles without the subversion of masculine or feminine characteristics that allowed Steve to be a masculine man who was also saved by Wonder Woman seemingly three times per issue. Robbins wrote, "The handsome but befuddled Steve Trevor exists because of an unwritten law of superhero comics: the hero must have a love interest, so there will always be someone to rescue. He is the Lois Lane to Wonder Woman's Superman" (Robbins 56). Like Lois, Steve recklessly runs towards danger out of a commitment to justice, though he acts in American interests and she focuses on journalistic integrity. As Robbins wrote, Wonder Woman takes place in a "woman's world." Steve navigates this topsy-turvy women-centric world with all the floundering and bewilderment of a newborn when speaking to Diana Prince instead of Wonder Woman. However, for every mistake, Diana is quick to offer a quip either mentally or audibly.

Since her introduction, Lois Lane has been the perfect example of a damsel in distress. Always ambitious and never passive, her recklessness in pursuit of a scoop led to an almost-death every issue in which she appeared. However, she chose recklessness to pursue journalistic integrity. For Lois, any danger was worth a good story, and she was confident that she could escape death with her brains alone. No need for Clark Kent or Superman —though he would certainly be there to save her. Unfortunately, the 50s and 60s reduce Lois Lane to her relationship to Superman as either his girlfriend or wife, but the Golden Age reporter has a spirit like no other.

In her first appearance, she takes pity on a dull Clark Kent who has fruitlessly tried

to woo her for some unknown amount of time. They go out dancing that night, and when Clark asks, "Why is it you always avoid me at the office?" Lois Remarks, "I've been scribbling sob stories all day long. Don't ask me to dish out another" ("Superman" 6). Lois's confidence and quick wit differed from the docile ideal of women at the time. On the following page, she slaps a man who wants to dance with her without her consent. Her resounding denial offered women a moment of catharsis. Though danger lurked behind every corner, she always asserted her voice.

Unlike Wonder Women, Lois had no sisterhood to fall back on. She is shown with few female friends and fewer female peers. She was isolated. Like Steve Trevor washing up alone on Themysciran shores, Lois waded through the seas of man's Metropolis isolated and detached. While Lois never expressed those feelings on the page, the female absences are felt. That feeling is relatable to so many women and girls who felt the world is unfair and inhospitable. Lois Lane encourages them to wade further and keep moving because the hope of another story may be as far as another shore or just around the corner.

Characters like Lois Lane, Wonder Woman, and Steve Trevor challenged gender conceptions of the 1940s. However, these characters were in no way the pinnacles of feminism. They alienated disabled, non-white, and queer readers. Even so, Wonder Woman and Lois Lane provide cathartic and relatable spaces for women to inspire and confide in each other while Steve Trevor acts as a male example of feminist masculinity. Their lessons were flawed, but instrumental all the same. Together, they helped children navigate the choppy waters of man's world as lighthouses of progress.

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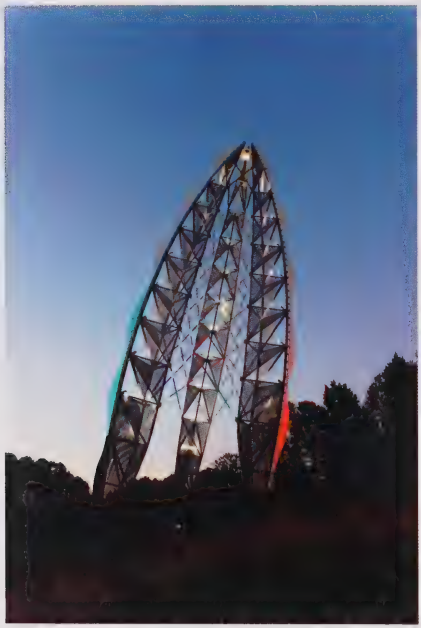
ART
&
DESIGN

Fig. 1: Hujar, Peter. "Lynn Davis (Pulling Hair)." The Peter Hujar Archive, The Peter Hujar Archive, 1981, http://peterhujararchive.com/images/eph_0615-2/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2021

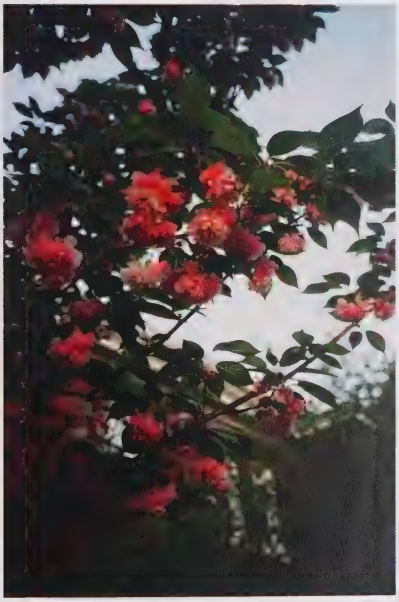
Fig. 2: Vermeer, Johannes. "Girl with a Pearl Earring." *Mauritshuis: "Girl with a Pearl Earring,"* Mauritshuis, 1665, https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/artworks/670-girl-with-a-pearl-earring/.Accessed 21 Oct. 2021.

Imagine Dragons evolve tour, madison square garden (2019)
Lara Boyle



Ascendus
Mabry Busby

Mushroom Cult
G'Kar Joseph

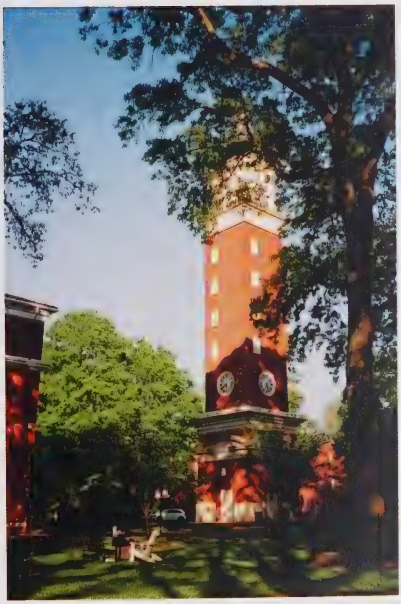


Royalty Blooms
Nathan Le

Vintage is Back!
Nathan Le

Rainy Day
Nathan Le

Workers in the City
Nathan Le



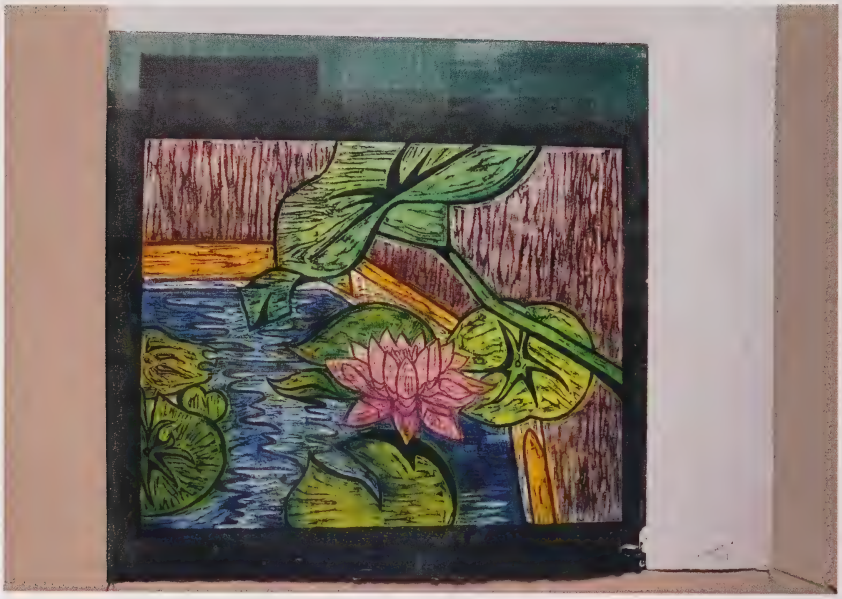
Queens Clock Tower
Nathan Le

Water Lily Bathroom
Sydney Moore

Industrial Restaurant
Sydney Moore

Morning Meeting with Mocha
Allison Morton

Drivin'
Reese Nguyen



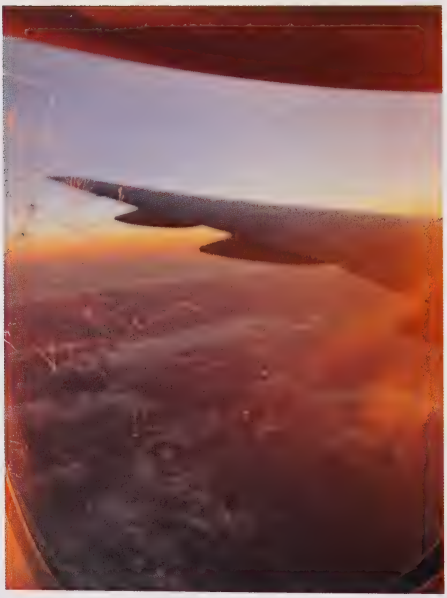
LOTUS
Reese Nguyen

SKELETON LIGHTS
Autumn Pointe

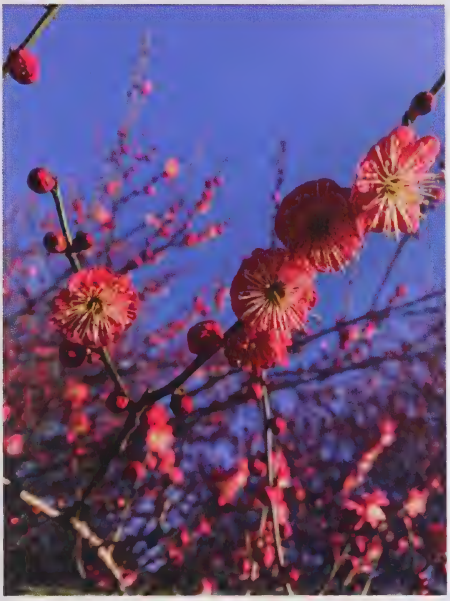
Back Home
Mari Robinson

Her Reflection
Mari Robinson

Sky and City
Mari Robinson



Frost at Sunrise
Sophia Russano



Flowers in February
Sophia Russano

Rose
Emily Walter

Mushroom
Emily Walter

Sunflower
Emily Walter

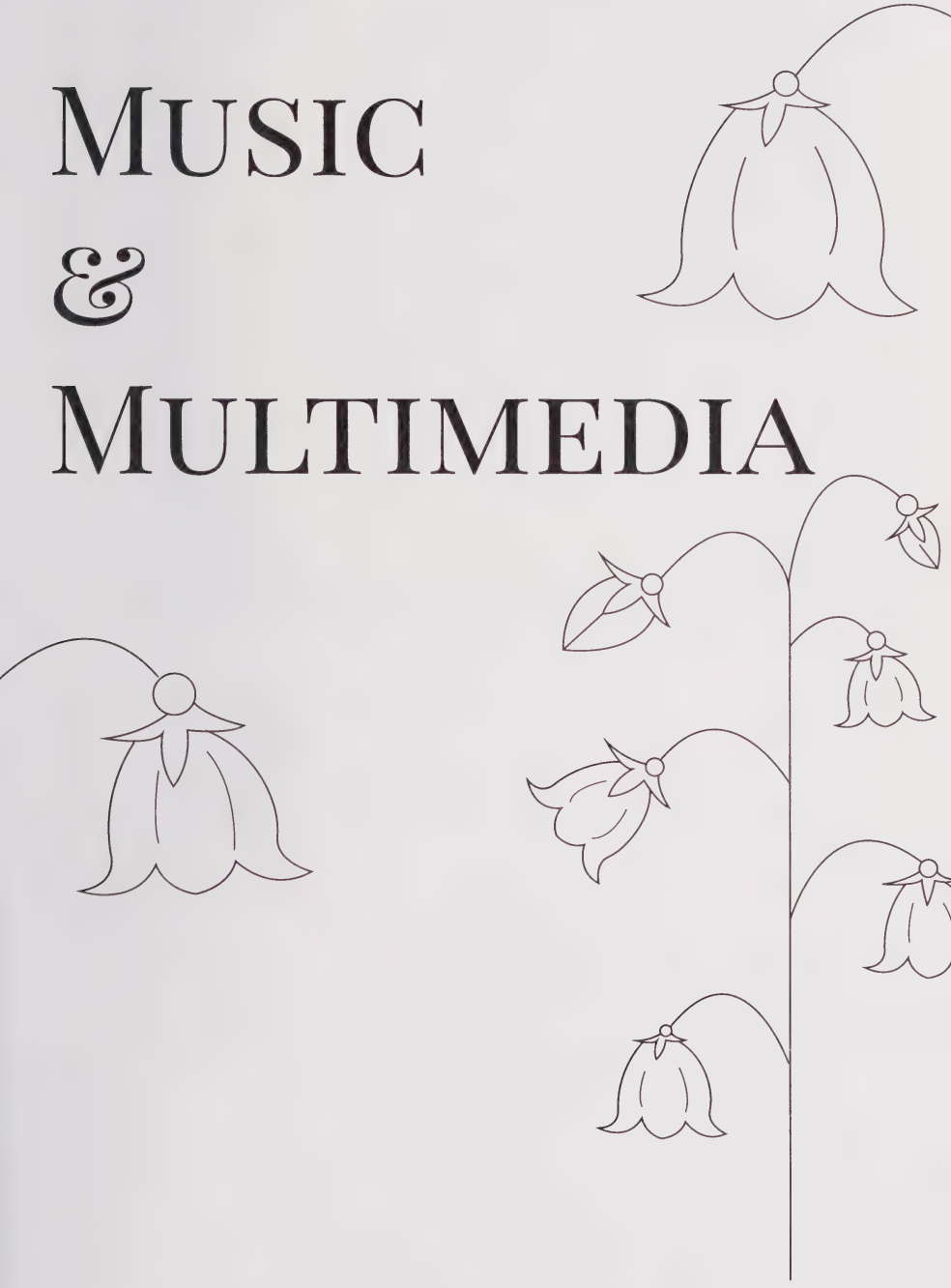
DAISY
Emily Walter

UNTITLED
Emily Walter

Serpent
Madison Webster

Time Crunch
Madison Webster

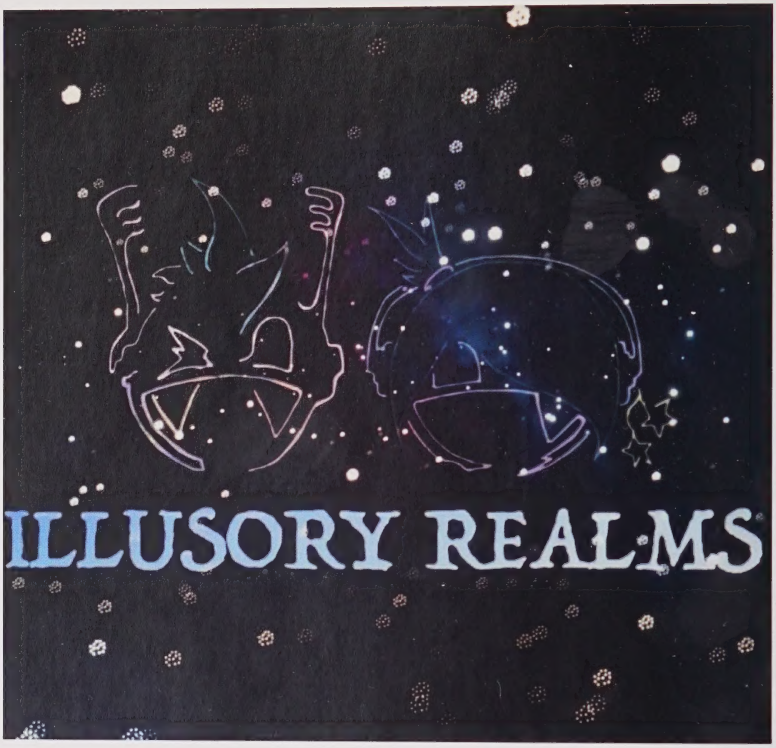
Music & Multimedia



Sky of Dreams

Victoria McKown

2022 2023



Illusory Realms

Ian Rosenberg

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"The world is tough and can certainly test your determination but it's also vast enough to have multiple avenues to success if one path doesn't work out."

Spotlight
Meg Rosenthal

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